

DAVID BEARNE  
S.J.



Class PZ7

Book B3805J

Copyright N<sup>o</sup>. \_\_\_\_\_

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.





# JACK SOUTH

AND

## SOME OTHER JACKS

BY

REV. DAVID BEARNE, S.J.

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN STAIR," "RIDINGDALE STORIES," ETC.

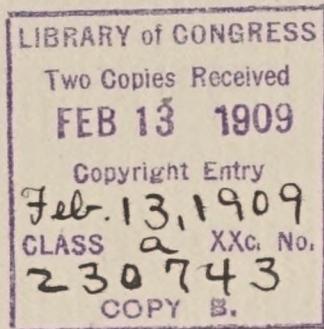
0  
3 3 2  
3 3  
3 3  
3 3

ST. LOUIS, MO., AND FREIBURG (BADEN)

PUBLISHED BY B. HERDER

1909

PZ7  
B38.053



COPYRIGHTED, 1909  
BY JOSEPH GUMMERSBACH

6 C 6  
6 C 6  
6 C 6  
6 C 6

BECKTOLD—  
PRINTING AND BOOK MFG. CO.  
ST. LOUIS, MO.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. CLUBS AND DIAMONDS . . . . .	I
II. SPADES AND HEARTS . . . . .	16
III. A WOOD AND WATER PARTY . . . . .	28
IV. A GOLDEN AFTERNOON . . . . .	46
V. THE FRIGID ZONE . . . . .	53
VI. DR. SOUTH . . . . .	64
VII. JOHNNY GIDLLOW . . . . .	76
VIII. AN ASSAULT . . . . .	83
IX. A STIRRING DAY . . . . .	96
X. A FEAST OF RECONCILIATION . . . . .	113
XI. THE DIMMING OF THE DIAMOND . . . . .	130
XII. ANXIETY . . . . .	136
XIII. FOR MOTHER'S SAKE . . . . .	141
XIV. FLOW AND EBB . . . . .	147
XV. MINSTREL BOYS . . . . .	150
XVI. AN UNEXPECTED INTERLUDE . . . . .	157
XVII. ANOTHER NEWSPAPER REPORT . . . . .	162
XVIII. A FATHER'S SENTENCE . . . . .	169
XIX. SERVITUDE . . . . .	176
XX. CORN HARVEST . . . . .	186
XXI. A VISITOR . . . . .	193
XXII. SEVERAL DISCOVERIES . . . . .	205
XXIII. THE DRIVE HOME . . . . .	219
XXIV. DAY DREAMS . . . . .	223
XXV. IN MOTHER'S ARMS . . . . .	228
XXVI. INSTRUCTION . . . . .	233
XXVII. CHRISTMAS . . . . .	235
XXVIII. A HARMONIOUS TRIO . . . . .	239
XXIX. A FULFILLED PROPHECY . . . . .	243
XXX. NEMESIS . . . . .	247
XXXI. JACK'S SCRUPLES . . . . .	251
XXXII. THE QUALITY OF MERCY . . . . .	256
XXXIII. TEN YEARS LATER . . . . .	262



# JACK SOUTH

## CHAPTER I

### CLUBS AND DIAMONDS

“Earth’s rose is a bud that’s checked or grows  
As beams may encourage or blasts oppose.”

— *Browning.*

“We’re all Jacks!”

Four lads in their early teens stood among the laurels of Lord Graycote’s shrubbery.

“But not knaves,” laughed the Hon. John Graycote.

“Won’t answer for myself or you,” said the first speaker, John South, only son of Dr. South, who was at this moment on a professional visit to Lady Graycote.

Jack Davison, son of Lord Graycote’s head gardener, laughed aloud. The fourth Jack, one of Gidlow’s sons — Gidlow being a laborer on the Graycote estate — smiled silently.

“Let’s take the names of cards,” said young South. He spoke rapidly but decisively, and by no means as one who is merely making a suggestion. “John, you shall be Diamonds.” But John Graycote shook his head.

“*You* shall be diamonds, Jack. Diamonds are bright — and so are you.”

"Also they're hard, and so am I. Very well! But what will you be? The John of Hearts, eh?"

Graycote was always *John*. Young South, who was his closest chum, insisted upon being called Jack. It saved confusion, he used to plead.

"If you like," said Lord Graycote's heir. He knew that Jack would have his own way in the end, whatever *he* might propose.

The other Jacks looked on in silence.

"I have it," said the doctor's son. "You shall be Jack (i.e., John) of *Clubs*; I forget how many Lord Graycote belongs to. The 'Carlton,' of course, the 'Rag and Bottle' possibly, and the 'Athenæum'—eh?"

Graycote was delighted. The other Jacks were puzzled.

"Davison! you're Jack of Spades!" exclaimed South to the gardener's son. "Most appropriate," he went on, "and Gidlow, my lad — well, you must be Jack of Hearts."

But the Jack of Spades was not pleased, and the Jack of Hearts did not quite understand what was happening.

John Graycote had been arranging the details of a small water-party and had pressed into his service young Davison and the lad Gidlow. The boat was to be ready at nine o'clock on the following morning, and the gardener's son, with the son of the gardener's laborer, were to be in attendance at that hour. The

four Jacks were looking forward to the event with "the heart's sure promise of festivity."

It was an August in which the river seemed made for living upon. Graycote, or Clubs, as we may call him now, had sounded his father on the subject of a house-boat. He had horrified his mother by declaring he would camp out if the weather lasted. It was an idle remark, and he knew it. The Graycote plate and diamonds were looked after with enormous care, but compared with the way in which the heir of Graycotes was guarded, the dishes and necklaces were altogether neglected.

John and Jack (or Clubs and Diamonds) had hoped to enjoy their water picnic without being bothered with servants. It was for this reason that Clubs had asked permission to take Davison and Gidlow. When Jack South had assured Lord Graycote that they both swam "rather better than the fishes," his Lordship consented, only bargaining that the boatman (a very bulky person named Belge) should be in charge of the boat. When they remembered that the old tub was a four-oar, and that Belge would row, taking a couple of oars as his natural share of the labor, they were good enough to tolerate Belge.

"This is to be an experimental party, Jack," said Clubs, as he and South left the Shrubbery. "Early next week, if your sisters will only honour us, we are all going afloat in the barge."

"Strawberry!" exclaimed the Jack of Diamonds

with enthusiasm, "the very thing the girls are longing for. Only don't forget my mater's dry-land picnic on Thursday week."

"Just as if a fellow living in Graycote *could* forget anything of that sort. When you go back to school I shall have only the parish bun-fight to look forward to."

"For pity's sake don't talk about going back. I've only just come. But that's you all over, John. By the way, have you made up that list of necessaries for to-morrow?" asked the doctor's son excitedly. "You pretend to be a model of method, but really if I didn't look after you —"

"Pax!" exclaimed Graycote, unfolding a long slip of paper.

Jack took the paper, and broke into a merry laugh. "The idea of beginning a list in that way! *Item. Pickles!*"

Diamonds leaned against a silver beech in order to laugh comfortably. John stood watching and rejoicing in his mirth.

"I haven't forgotten the rage you were in last summer at Litford Leigh, when the 'Indian mixed' were not forthcoming," remarked John of the Clubs. "You bullied me like an alderman."

"John, I was a glutton then. I am a year older, and (I hope) wiser. You shall see to-morrow how prudent I *can* be."

“Why not to-day? You’re going to lunch with us, you know.”

“No, John, I’ve promised to go back with the dad. It’s only my second day, you see, and the girls—”

“Bother the girls!” had risen to the lips of young Graycote, but he checked himself with—“What a nuisance!”

“O, are they?” asked Jack maliciously, thereby covering his friend with confusion. “Much you know about it—a fellow that hasn’t a sister to bless himself with.”

“Don’t Jack. You know I didn’t mean that. Only I had been counting upon you for luncheon.”

“Horrible old cannibal!” shrieked Jack, making a playful rush at his chum, and almost overturning the slight, lanky form of the latter. “Let us compromise. Look us up in the late afternoon and we will give you tea—and pickles. Also some music you’ve never heard before. Knew that would bring him,” said Jack with triumph, as he watched John’s pale face flush with pleasure and the look of disappointment vanish.

“I shall come at five o’clock and be very thankful. But do run through that list before you go. You’re such an exacting person at these times, I don’t know—”

“Pickles—rugs—lunch—fishing tackle—now

that's just what I object to in you,"— Jack broke off in his reading and tried to glare at the other. " What is the good of putting down 'lunch' simply? Any fool could do that. The very reason I asked you to draw up a list was that I might see if you had ordered enough grub."

" I've spoken to Mrs. Taylor and Wilkins," began Graycote.

" Yes, I think I see you going into the housekeeper's room, and remarking casually that you wanted a little luncheon putting up for to-morrow — ' just a snack of something, Mrs. Taylor '—(like that)— when you know that a grown man, and four growing lads, are going out for the day."

" Really Jack—"

" O, I know you've got the appetite of a tom-tit. But think of the other three lads — not to mention Belge!"

" But surely you can trust Mrs. Taylor to —"

" To give us everything that is necessary, and many things that aren't, if you will only explain the circumstances. Mrs. Taylor's a brick, if you only tell her what you want."

Jack had worked himself up to a fine affectation of extreme irascibility. But John knew him, and excused his rudeness. Diamonds was given to little outbursts of this sort.

" Make out your own list, old man," said the quiet

Clubs. "It shall be carried out to the smallest detail."

Then, of course, Jack felt how very rude he had been.

"I'm beastly sorry, John! I'm a regular pig! But you know I wasn't thinking only of myself."

"Don't believe you were thinking of yourself at all."

"Wasn't I, though!"

"Well, now, do make some suggestions."

"No, old man," said the penitent Jack, "I mustn't make a suggestion, and won't. Only tell Mrs. Taylor how many people are going. It's sure to be all right."

"You see I put 'pickles' first on the list to show that I hadn't forgotten."

"You're the most considerate fellow on earth. Ah!" remarked Jack as he looked down the list again, "glad you're bringing waterproofs and umbrellas. Couldn't you add goloshes? Might be useful, you know. Oh! and White's *Selborne*, and Walton's *Angler*. Might have thrown in 'Sandford and Merton' while you were about it. Hullo! what's this? Flute! John, my boy, you don't mean to say that you've taken up the flute since Christmas?"

"I thought you'd be pleased," said Clubs, with a half sigh. "I was hoping it would be a pleasant surprise."

"So it is, old fellow," exclaimed Jack, seizing his friend's hand. "And I forgive you not mentioning

it in your letters. I'm awfully pleased. Bring it down to us this evening, won't you? We can have some duets."

"I'm only a learner, you know. Mr. Burton has been giving me lessons, and I've got rather a good instrument."

"Bravo! I shall bring my banjo on board to-morrow. We must make that little beggar Gidlow sing. I say, John, what a voice that lad has got! Beats any fellow or any woman, I've ever heard."

"My father says he has never heard such a perfect treble in any cathedral choir."

"Yet the chap is singing in a poky little village church on Sundays and weeding your garden — I beg your pardon, John; I'm getting rude again."

"No, you're not. It is a shame; but what's to be done?"

"Heaps of things — but, I say, I shall miss the dad if I don't look sharp! We must put our heads together about Gidlow."

The two friends had unconsciously wandered out of the pleasure grounds into the open park. Driving slowly down the gravelled roadway that led from the hall, they saw Dr. South.

"Good-bye, John! I must run for it!" said Jack, starting off. Then turning round for a moment he shouted, still running, "Be sure to order lots of lemonade."

John Graycote laughed softly as he walked back to

the hall. "What a surprise I'll give him to-morrow," he said to himself. "Dear old Jack! If only I'd a brother like him. But it's just as good. If I'd had a brother, I should have been sent to school. That might have been pleasant, and we might, perhaps, have gone to Eton together. But as I haven't a brother, and as I have Jack twice in the year, I'm content. It's lucky I showed him the list. I do believe I gave Mrs. Taylor the notion that I was going out alone. What a mess we should have been in! Jack thinks of everybody and everything."

The people in the village would have told you that Mr. John Graycote was a little "odd." Some would have said "old-fashioned." In a limited degree he was both. He was what the circumstances of his life had made him. The only child of a peer who was trying to get back what his ancestors had let slip—trying to repair by economy what his immediate predecessors had squandered in dissipation, John Graycote had led a somewhat lonely and, what would have been to many lads of his station, a monotonous life. When he was eight years old he had been seized with an illness which but for the timely and skilful treatment of Dr. South would have been fatal. A long and aggravated attack of rheumatic fever had left him weak and ailing. From his birth he had never been a healthy child, and from the time of his long illness he had been regarded as an invalid—by his parents, at least. For him school was out of the

question. Mr. Burton—the rector of Graycote—came to the hall four days in the week to superintend the lad's studies. Happily for the young heir, the Rev. Mark Burton was an interesting teacher and a genial companion. A comparatively young man and an ardent naturalist, the parson-tutor succeeded in making his pupil as fond of the woods and the fields as he himself was; and as the lad was too fragile to turn to any sport except a very little mild cricket and tennis and, when the weather was warm, an occasional day's fishing—rambles in the park, saunterings in the home-meadows, and loiterings in garden and shrubbery, made up the chief pleasures of his life.

Lord Graycote was a politician, and a political as well as a domestic economist. He was also an enthusiastic gardener. Some of his neighbors would tell you that his lordship made his garden pay, and it was without doubt the largest and best kept in the county. Accordingly, his gardener was an important person, earning an important salary.

Lord Graycote did not advertise the fact, nevertheless it was a fact that the garden (that is, the garden as Davison had made it) went a very long way towards paying the household expenses of Graycote Hall. Very few guests were entertained there, for besides the need there was of a strictly economical style of living, Lady Graycote was always ailing and generally indisposed to receive visitors. The Graycotes saw but little of their neighbours. Perhaps Dr.

and Mrs. South and their children were the only callers who were always welcomed.

Some of the more aristocratic persons in the locality marvelled that Lady Graycote should receive the wife of a country surgeon — even though she could claim to be a daughter of Sir Andrew Barleigh. In fact society fretted over the fact a good deal. It did not help the matter if you reminded society that Mr. South was only a country doctor by the accident of choice. That one of the most fashionable west-end physicians — on the high road to a baronetcy — should have come to live in a little town like Graycote was an irritating circumstance many people tried to account for and failed. But that the Graycotes should have taken him up in such a marked way was more irritating still. However, society took its usual revenge by becoming spiteful and sarcastic.

“So convenient, my dear,” it would say to a bosom friend, “to place a skilled doctor under obligations to you. It must be thought of in connection with his fees. So nice, so very nice, to have a man of that sort at your beck and nod, and to contrive that a morning call shall do duty for a professional visit.” Then society would laugh nastily over its own shrewdness and perception.

Perhaps no two men in the wide world disagreed over a greater number of subjects than did Lord Graycote and Dr. South. They regarded almost everything from totally different points of view. They had

mutually distrusted each other for years. They had even opposed one another in public speeches and in the public press. But when Dr. South had literally snatched the hope and heir of the Graycotes from the clutches of death, Lord Graycote's heart went out to the doctor with something very like the tenderness of personal friendship.

"If any man other than South had been called, and if he had delayed five minutes — your child would have been in his coffin at this moment," said Sir James Grayson (who had been telegraphed for at Dr. South's suggestion) to Lord Graycote. "With such complications I have never known a weakly child to recover after an attack of this sort." And the dry-as-dust and utterly emotionless Lord Graycote had sought out Dr. South, seized his hand and kissed it.

"Do be friendly with him, dear," said Mrs. South to her husband, when he recounted this incident. "A man who loves his child so much cannot be contemptible."

"I have never contemned him, Maggie," the doctor said. "We have only met once before, but I must say that I found it hard to like him. However, being friendly depends entirely upon his lordship."

After-events proved to Dr. South that Lord Graycote's friendliness was of a very positive order. The latter pleaded so hard that little Jack South should be allowed to visit John Graycote in his convalescence, that the doctor could not find it in his heart to dis-

courage such a proceeding, the consequence being that before either of the little Johnnies was nine years old, they had become fast chums.

But one fine day society received a shock from which, as we have shown, it never recovered.

Lady Graycote had called upon Mrs. South!

From that day her ladyship knew what it was to have a friend. And if one has a friend, how entirely impotent are the shafts of society!

“Strong and sweet Mrs. South,” as somebody named her, had scores of friends. If the doctor’s wife had accepted a third of the invitations she was constantly receiving from different parts of England, the village of Graycote would never have been blessed by a sight of her. She accepted very few, but sent out many. There was generally a home party at the South’s.

People said, “That kind of thing can’t go on you know. No country practice will support that rate of living. Does Dr. South forget that he is not now a West-end physician? Where does the money come from”?

Then another set of people would say: “What dowdies the South girls are! Don’t believe they’ve got a yard of silk in their wardrobe or that they own a brooch amongst them. Then, they never drive more than one horse, though they own two. And the doctor never hunts, as old Galton used to do. Perhaps he can’t ride.”

Dr. South was a veritable puzzle to some of his neighbors. They could not understand his motives for leaving London and settling in the country. They could not understand his style of living and the way in which he seemed to combine primitive simplicity with almost lordly hospitality. They could not understand his manners, so unaffected and yet so cultivated. I say that some of his neighbors could not understand the doctor, and among these were two or three of the richest families in and near Graycote.

There was for instance a family as old as that of Graycote itself — the Plissards of Graycote Temple. They had used distinctly libellous language in regard to the Souths, for no earthly reason as far as the latter could make out, except that they had the "impertinence" to come and live at Graycote. There was a retired starch manufacturer named Stickart who also resented Dr. South's presence very warmly. And there was a gentleman from the Potteries, Mugleigh by name, whose great fear was that the moral tone of Graycote would be lastingly lowered by the continued residence therein of a "parcel of loose Londoners."

Dr. South knew the sentiments of these gentlemen and their families very well. Knew and laughed over them. In fact the doctor was a good deal given to laughing and didn't mind people knowing it. He laughed and made constant additions to his house — a very good house, by the way, and having at the back of it several acres of land. His detractors watched

the process of new wings in building, and the laying out of bigger gardens and broader lawns—watched grimly and opined that the entire place would be in the market that time twelve months.

But it was not.

## CHAPTER II

### SPADES AND HEARTS

“If only Art were suing, mine would plead to purpose.”

—*Browning.*

“What made young South call you Jack of Hearts?” asked the gardener’s son of Jack Gidlow, when young Graycote and his friend had left the shrubbery.

It was just the question the simple country lad was asking himself, and he could find no answer to it. He had never played at cards in all his innocent life — had never, in fact, had a pack of cards in his hand. Accordingly he answered, very truthfully, that he didn’t know.

“That’s a blooming lie,” ejaculated Master Davison, coming a step nearer to the young laborer and showing anger in his big fat face. Not a stupid face though by any means. Jack Davison had also come home for his summer holidays and had brought with him from an expensive boarding-school prizes for Greek, Latin and mathematics. It was not an ugly face either; too fat, perhaps, and sadly wanting in refinement, but by no means ugly, except at a moment like this when it wore an expression of extreme annoyance, if not of downright anger.

Gidlow stepped backward into the laurels. “Who

was Jack of Hearts, sir?" he asked timidly, faltering ever so little. He was not frightened, but as he had begun work punctually at six o'clock that morning and it was now nearly twelve, and as his breakfast had been confined to tea and bread-and-dripping, he did not feel himself quite up to fighting mark. Moreover, he had been weeding, and six hours of weeding with only ten minutes interval for light refreshment is apt to take something out of a boy of fourteen.

"None of your cheek, you whining little fool!" exclaimed Davison. He had a half suspicion that Gidlow was chaffing him.

"I've never heard of him," said the younger lad, the pure pink of his cheeks deepening a little, for Davison had taken him by the arm and was clutching him rather tightly. After the manner of his kind, the toiler had thrown off coat and waistcoat, and the sleeves of his shirt were rolled up above the elbow. Davison's fingers were strong upon that bare arm.

But the big lad paused for a moment. The clear blue eyes looking straight up into his own angry face had not a suspicion of mischief in them at that moment. They were inquiring, wondering eyes, charged with a present anxiety. Davison changed his tactics.

"What a precious ninny you must be!" he ejaculated, letting go of Gidlow's arm. "D'ye mean to say that you never played at all fours, or cribbage, or whist, or — beggar-my-neighbor? That would be about your size I reckon."

"No, sir," said Gidlow, somewhat relieved, but a little ashamed of his ignorance.

"Lor! what a hole this is," said Davison, planting his hands deeply into the side pockets of his coat and stretching his legs very wide apart. "What a beastly hole," he went on, surveying the noble shrubbery in which he was standing with what was meant to be an air of contempt. "How do these cads manage to exist?"

But Johnny Gidlow's ears were listening to a little burst of song from a near hedgerow, and his eyes were following the flight of a linnet.

The striking of a big clock in the stable-yard at length reminded him of his dinner-hour. It was twelve o'clock. His adversary was whistling softly to himself and appeared to be considering how to deal with such an ignorant little cad as the one before him. Gidlow by way of a gentle reminder — how he was aching for his dinner! — began to unroll his shirt sleeves as a preliminary to the putting on of his coat. The gardener's son took out his watch. It was a gold one, so at least Gidlow thought. He supposed that a boy with a gold watch must be a gentleman. A minute or two ago the little lad had been debating within himself whether or not he should say "Sir" to this boy of fifteen, and the son of a man who was his employer and master. The gold watch decided it.

"I've got to go to dinner, sir," said Gidlow.

“Have you, now?” said Davison smiling, though not very pleasantly. “Got to go to dinner, have you? Well, don’t be in a hurry, I’ve not quite done with you yet.”

Gidlow looked in the direction of a certain small bundle which was lying under a tree at the far end of the shubbery. That bundle was not visible to him because it was covered by his coat. But he could see the coat from where he stood.

“About that Jack of Hearts, you know,” said Davison, getting quite jocular; “I am going to tell you who he is and all about him.”

The hungry boy sighed and smoothed down the sleeves of his shirt.

“That Jack of Hearts is not a particularly nice fellow, you know. Not at all the sort of fellow I should like to be named after.”

Gidlow thought his master’s son more unpleasant when he laughed than when he looked angry. The anxious look came back into the blue eyes. Davison saw it and laughed more noisily than ever. He would have “no end of a lark with this green little kid,” he thought to himself.

“Mind, I know nothing about it,” said Master Davison checking his merriment and putting on a look of great seriousness. “It may or may not be a case for the reformatory; I only go by what young South said. Perhaps they might let you off with a birching.”

Davison saw that every word was telling upon the

unsophisticated lad. It was what he intended, and he rejoiced.

“Thieving ain’t a nice thing, is it now? Well, to call a fellow ‘Jack of Hearts’ is the same thing as calling him a thief.”

The hungry hard-worked lad turned pale. He had all a country boy’s dread of the majesty of the law, and, though he had never so much as robbed an orchard in his life, the mere sight of a policeman made him uncomfortable.

But his enemy would not spare him.

“I can show it to you in black and white if you don’t believe me,” said Davison. “It’s in poetry and it runs like this:

‘It was the wicked Jack of Hearts  
That took and stole the raspberry tarts.’

Davison was not prepared for what followed.

Johnny Gidlow had never heard of the *examen* of conscience, but a very rapid survey of his past life convinced him that whatever Jack of Hearts might have effected in the raspberry-tart-stealing line, he, Johnny Gidlow, had never once cast eyes on such delicacies.

The enemy had indeed over-reached himself absurdly. The boy before him had never played a game of cards; but he was no fool for all that.

“You’re joking me, sir,” he answered respectfully, but with the tone of one who had made up his mind

and knew what he was going to do. "I must go and get my dinner now."

And before Davison had recovered from his surprise, Johnny Gidlow had disappeared among the laurels.

The laboring boy had not seen very much of Davison, though that young man had been at home a week or two. When they had met, the gardener's son had generally addressed him as "Kid," ordering him here and there, and sending him to fetch this or that. But as the "Kid" had been taught to order himself lowly and reverently to all his betters, and as there was no doubt in his mind but that young Davison was one of the said betters, Gidlow had obeyed dutifully. Davison, senior, had engaged the boy to work in Lord Graycote's garden; and as this situation had been Johnny's only alternative to bird-tenting or plough-driving, he had accepted the post very thankfully. Indeed he was not a little proud of his connection with the Hall garden. His father had worked there for a matter of thirty years and had never risen above the rank of a laborer, had never earned more than fifteen shillings a week. Johnny was earning six, which was a shilling a day; and the working day had at least eleven hours in it. Still, the young lad persuaded himself that he was doing well.

To-day, as he removed his fustian jacket from the little dinner bundle, he was just a trifle troubled. His

father had often impressed upon him the wisdom of "keeping in with the Davisons." Johnny asked himself for the twentieth time how he managed to "get out" with young John Davison. He had run on errands for this stylish school-boy, had brought tobacco and cigars from the village shop for him, taken letters to various places (some of them by no means on his way home) after his work was done, and Davison had rewarded him for these services by throwing him a cigar, which Johnny dared not smoke, but which he had given to a grown-up brother. Johnny's philosophy was a limited one, to be sure, but he could not understand how Davison contrived to have a grievance against him.

He called to mind the previous scene in the shrubbery when young Mr. South discovered that they were "all Jacks." Mr. Graycote had been discussing arrangements for the morrow and had asked Gidlow what his Christian name was. South had immediately turned to Davison with the same question, and both Graycote and his friend thought the coincidence a good joke. South never dreamt that his subsequent remark would disturb the gardener's son. He had, however, annoyed that young man a good deal. Gidlow had noticed the flush of displeasure and did not understand the meaning of his own new title. He would like to ask Mr. South about it, he thought. But he was much too shy a boy to put such a thought into execution; he knew that very well.

"I will ask John Davison, though," he said to himself, eating big munches of bread to a pitiful atom of bacon. "I'll wait till he's in a good humor. I'll ask him some day when I've been doing something for him. Perhaps this hot weather makes him nasty."

He had dismissed the tart-stealing episode from his mind altogether. In fact, as the bread and bacon disappeared, he forgot to think even of Davison. Tomorrow he was going up the river with the "young lord" and Mr. South. He did not at all know what it would be like. He had never been on such an expedition before. Of course he anticipated a good deal of work of some sort; had he not been taught that he had come into the world on purpose to work hard? But rowing, if that were required of him, would be a change from weeding. And he would hear my lord's son and his friend laugh and talk as they were wont to do in the garden, and he enjoyed that a good deal. They were to be out all day, too, and would that mean —? he did not know what to think about dinner. Perhaps as the gentlemen dined in the evening they would not want anything. He could not fancy Mr. Graycote and the doctor's son eating in an open boat.

To be sure Davison would be there, but then in such circumstances he would be in a good temper. Gidlow had noticed that the gardener's son was pleased when Mr. Graycote asked him to join the party. And as Johnny stretched himself out under the shade of the spreading tree to take the remaining twenty min-

utes of his dinner-hour in repose, he fell again to wondering on the significance of 'Jack of Hearts' and the unaccountable resentment of the gardener's son.

He would never have guessed what had, in the first place, roused young Davison's dislike of him. The day before had been Sunday, and the gardener's son had accompanied his father to the parish church. Now it happened that as the people were dispersing, the Davisons were immediately in the rear of Dr. South's family and visitors. One of the last mentioned — a young lady — began to address her hostess almost as soon as they had cleared the church porch.

"Who is that dear little boy with the white gold hair and the voice of an angel?"

Davison heard the question, and saw Mrs. South turn to her friend with a pleased expression of countenance which to him was maddening.

"He is our only artist," Mrs. South was beginning; but Davison pushed ahead and heard no more. He allowed the words to rankle in his mind, though, and when on the following morning Jack South dubbed the little laborer "Jack of Hearts," Davison was enraged.

"A dirty little clod-hopper like that to attract everybody's notice!" he said to himself as he put on the stick-up collar — so unbecoming, if he had only known it — and the variegated tie of which he was so vain, and which he had persuaded himself made him look at least three years older.

A boy of eighteen may be forgiven for wishing to look a little like a grown man; a boy of fifteen — never. Strange that a matter of two or three years should make all the difference; but it is precisely a case in which the principle of “a little more and how much it is” may be applied.

How could such jealousy have arisen so quickly and with so little reason? If Davison had seen Gidlow taken apart by the great people who attended Graycote church — taken apart and petted and made much of — why even then there would have been no excuse for the bigger and better educated and better cared-for lad’s ill feeling. But the ridiculous part of the business was that Gidlow had never been petted, had never received particular notice from anybody. As a mere question of fact, his singing had attracted attention, had been highly praised and his entire person made the subject of much conversation in Graycote drawing-rooms. But the “dear little lad with white gold hair and the voice of an angel” had been singing in the parish church for five years, had gone to the village school daily till he was thirteen-and-a-half and since that time had worked eleven hours a day in Lord Graycote’s garden with little or no recognition.

“He is a very good little lad,” Mr. Burton used to say to various wealthy parishioners who praised Gidlow’s singing — “a very innocent boy indeed, and quite free from vanity of a palpable sort. I have

never taken much notice of him and don't intend to do so. It is a very dangerous thing to praise lads of that class, and a very easy thing to spoil them for life."

"That class more than any other?" asked the laughing Dr. South one day to the Rev. Mark Burton, after a speech of this kind.

"Oh, undoubtedly," said the parson. "It is very easy to make them discontented with their surroundings."

"I can well believe that," the doctor had rejoined, laughing so much more than the circumstances seemed to require that the rector looked puzzled. But the doctor changed the subject.

Johnny Gidlow had indeed fancied that he was an object of interest to various ladies and gentlemen who met him in the village street from time to time, and to whom he doffed his cap with becoming respect. But he had been too much confused to look them in the face and had never noticed the eye-glasses that were levelled at him, or suspected that he was being discussed by these great people. Once, and once only had a little sweet if indirect praise been given him, and that had remained a holy memory to the boy ever since.

A very old clergyman had come to preach a special sermon one Sunday evening. In the choir vestry, after service, he had walked up to Johnny and placing his hands on the child's hair had said —

"May God bless you, my dear little lad. I came to preach to you, but you have preached to me."

Then the old clergyman had put something into the boy's hand, something that Johnny thought was a medal, but which his mother thankfully recognized as a crown piece.

Yes, Davison's jealousy was as unreasonable as that vice generally is.

But it had its origin in a fact which the gardener's son was very loath to admit to himself and quite unwilling to admit to any other person.

Little by little during the last week or two in which he had been at home, the conviction had been growing in his mind that a very favorite theory of his, and one highly approved at the school he had been sent to, would not hold water. The theory was that every person of the lower orders was a cad. It was disturbing, then, to come across a lad who certainly ought to have been, but somehow was not, a cad. Clad in cassock and surplice and seated in the chancel of the parish church, Johnny might have been mistaken for a boy prince; and even when he was working in the garden, there was nothing in his dress or appearance in any way offensive or that proclaimed the ill-bred rustic. To the pretentious Jack of Spades (whose father had once been in the very same position of life as Johnny Gidlow) these circumstances were puzzling and vexatious.

## CHAPTER III

### A WOOD AND WATER PARTY

Has come the time of sweet serenity  
When color glows unglittering, and the soul  
Of visible things shows silent happiness.

—George Eliot.

The boys had a delightful row up the river and reached Tishley Wood by half-past ten.

“A jolly long day before us,” said Jack South. “John, is it beetle-hunting first and fishing afterwards, or vice versa?”

“Business first,” answered Graycote.

“Thanks. I finished business at six o’clock on Friday evening last. But of course I give in. Fetch up your pots and pans, your pill-boxes and specimen glasses, and let us bottle the bumptious beetle. But mind! fishing from luncheon till we start back!”

“Certainly, Jack! But I’ve got an idea.”

“Well, hold on to it for a minute, if —”

But Graycote was saying something in French. It had occurred to him that Davison and Gidlow might be hungry. “You were so strong on the matter yesterday,” he added, “that I determined not to forget the other two lads.”

“I said three. But I’m not hungry, old man. Gid-

low is certain to be. I saw him dining one day. John, you've no idea what poor grub he gets! It has cured me of grumbling at School, even on salt-horse days. No doubt Davison has breakfasted well, but for the sake of Belge and the other chap — open the larder!"

They had been whispering together at the bottom of the boat, and now Clubs opened one of the big hampers. There were lime trees in the neighborhood, but their scent was immediately overpowered.

"Hearts, my laddie!" cried the Doctor's son, "you look as if you'd lived on milk and cherries all your life. Do just try this — What is it, John? O, I see — this game pie! It's ever so much better than it looks."

John was casting about for knife and fork and spoon.

"Now, John, you know you can't carve. Allow me to let daylight into that confection. Gidlow, the plates are in that hamper. Davison, some pie?"

Johnny Gidlow's cheeks were burning with confusion and delight.

"It's a case of 'lark and leveret lay,'" said Jack, putting an entire bird on each plate. "John, you've done your duty nobly. Upon my word I've half a mind —"

"Do, old fellow. Gidlow, another plate?"

"John!" — the Doctor's son spoke with much solemnity — "I'm an only son. Of course there are girls. Nevertheless, I want to live."

They were still speaking in an undertone. Each of them took a morsel of pie—"to keep the other fellows in countenance," as Jack expressed it.

"You see this pie?" said Jack to Gidlow, who was enjoying himself hugely, but managed to articulate a husky "Yes, sir."

"Well, it's only a specimen of the kind of thing we've got to get through somehow. Ready for some more, Belge?"

Belge was slowly ploughing through a wedge of cold pie sufficient to dine a family. He tried hard to speak, but failed through alternate laughing and choking.

"Davison, a tartlet? Are they strawberry or raspberry, John?"

Johnny Gidlow glanced at Davison, but that young man was still struggling with his game pie.

"Gidlow, one of these patties?"

But Johnny could only look up and smile. It was clear he would not be through for the next ten minutes.

The restlessly active South made a dive into the bottom of the boat.

"Good!" exclaimed John. "Banjo by all means."

"Which it's a guitar," said Jack, hauling the instrument out of its case. "Let the sleeping flute lie low, John. I'm going to sing. Hearts, you nightingale, forgive my audacity. I shall only attempt a serio-comic song. Be quiet, John, I will tootle. It's a song

I made myself — words and music — and I'm proud of it. If you don't like it, you needn't encore."

"Bravo, Jack! This is a treat."

"Do listen to the opening symphony."

Jack South was much more than a boy amateur on any instrument. The Doctor himself was devoted to the art, as indeed was every member of the family. It was still an open question whether Jack should not go to Leipsic. His own mind was quite made up on the subject, but he was too dutiful a son to insist upon anything against his father's will. Still, he was full of hope on the subject, and he had succeeded in winning his mother's consent.

John Gidlow forgot his pie — to be sure, he was no longer hungry — as the lute strings began to tinkle, and South's nimble fingers made Summer melody.

"It's a 'Ballade of the Orchard,'" Jack called out as he worked away at the introduction.

The south wind swept across the river; the slow water glided onward to the sea; a boy's pure contralto filled the riverside with melody.

In the season of blossoms, of flowers and of grasses,

(Gone are the chill storms, cold and sleet)

Come where the Spring in her ecstasy passes

With ivory fingers and rose-pink feet;

Come to the orchard-croft's retreat,

And as the low winds in the branches hum,

Say, is there blossom on earth so sweet

As the bloom of the apple and pear and plum!

When the world is a tangle of flowers, and tasses

Of succory climb o'er the garden seat,

The far bells chiming are musical glasses,  
 The pulse of the hour scarce seems to beat,  
 And the present is true as the past is a cheat;  
 To the orchard, hearties, hasten and come,  
 There is sweetsome shade from the midsummer heat  
 'Neath the leaves of the apple, and pear, and plum.

Where the bindweed climbs in its mischievous masses,  
 A fruit-strewn lawn shall the Autumn greet,  
 A banquet spread for laddies and lasses,  
 Rose-bloom sweets for the rosy to eat,  
 Gold for the golden children meet;  
 Shake the thick clusters, or even though some  
 Lie on the broad white daisy sheet —  
 Fruit of the apple and pear and plum.

#### ENVOI.

Chicks! to the orchard when little lambs bleat,  
 And ever in Summer with John for a chum;  
 But wait for me in the time of wheat  
 When ripe are the apple, and pear, and plum.

There was a storm of applause as Jack twanged the last note on his guitar, Belge joining in with enthusiasm. Graycote cried encore till he was hoarse. But Jack rose to his feet and bowing, now to one end of the boat now to the other, after the manner of a professional singer, declined the encore with such an exaggeration of politeness that all the boys were convulsed with laughter.

“ John, if you don’t instantly produce lemonade, I throw myself into the river.” He had resumed his seat, and was beginning to strum a lively little gavotte. “ There is poor Gidlow choked with thirst: can’t finish his pie for want of a drink.”

Johnny had indeed become oblivious of food. To him music was as strong wine, and if he was thirsty he did not know it.

“I made such a point of the lemonade,” said Jack, twanging away at his guitar, and pretending not to notice that his friend was pulling bottle after bottle of the sparkling water out of a three dozen case.

“Ah! then you didn’t forget it after all?” he went on as John handed him a tall glass.

“I’ve forgotten nothing but the tin cases and pill-boxes for the insects,” said Graycote.

“Just as it should be — we’ll get to fishing all the sooner, if we haven’t driven away all the fishes.”

“Give us the ballade again, Jack, that will make the fishes swarm. By the way, did you really compose that for the occasion?”

“Well, for an occasion; that is, for a similar occasion. But of course it was written for you.” Jack laid aside his guitar, and devoted himself to the lemonade. “But give us a little tootling, John.”

John never thought of disobeying this keen, bright chum of his, with the dark merry eyes of an Italian, and the thick short black curls which seemed to lie about his head like a perfectly fitting cap.

“Can’t do much, Jack, but what say you to a bit of the Carnival?”

“Why, that I’ll help you with guitar accompaniment.”

Gidlow was completely absorbed in what followed,

and Davison and Belge were more than content to lie on the thick boat cushions and listen to such harmony on such a day.

"It requires the violin, Jack," said Graycote at the close of the performance.

"Not a word, John! You are becoming a musician." And the merry Jack, loath to put away the guitar, broke into an extemporary stanza.

"There was a time, a well-remembered time—  
(No doubt in May)

When—John my boy, I cannot get a rhyme—  
You weren't so gay!"

"True enough, Jack. But do you think there's any music in me?"

"Of course there is. Heaps. There's music in every boy."

One boy was listening eagerly.

"True, but have I got the — what d'ye call it? — the inspiration? I know I am not an Apollo like you —"

"Like Gidlow, you mean. He's the only Apollo in the company. Gidlow, forgive my calling you names," Jack said, turning to the blushing chorister. "Remember, now, you're Jack of Hearts, alias Apollo. If I hadn't given you the names myself I should turn green with jealousy."

Jack turned such a bright face on the working boy that, although the latter was more mystified than ever, it was clear to him that young Mr. South meant to

be complimentary. Davison was unpacking the fishing tackle.

Graycote suggested that as it was nearly half-past eleven they should take a stroll in the wood. There was one particular beetle he wanted to bag, he said: after that he would return.

“Will you go with us?” said Jack to Belge and the boys.

“Don’t if you’d rather remain here,” put in Graycote.

“Of course they would, John,” said South as he and his friend stepped ashore. Davison was following close behind.

“O, you want to come? Very good,” said Graycote.  
“Well, Belge and Gidlow may remain in the boat.”

“Belge is asleep already,” said Jack. Then he called to Gidlow from the bank—“Hearts (that is Apollo) lie down and have a gentle nap. Remember, you’ve got to ‘strike the lyre’ after luncheon.”

Davison was on the point of forgetting himself. He had turned round savagely to South; but fortunately that young gentleman was pre-occupied with the ludicrous appearance of Belge, who was just beginning to snore horribly. Suddenly it occurred to Davison that the phrase “strike the lyre” had a merely musical significance. All the same he was careful to attach himself to Mr. Graycote rather than to the other.

Johnny Gidlow, stretching himself out on the bottom

of the boat as South suggested, felt no inclination to sleep. His brain was in a tumult with the unexpected pleasure of the holiday, and the conversation that had gone on from the moment of starting — the brilliance of young South — the song and the music of flute and guitar. He had had no work to do after the hampers were put on board. South had elected himself captain before anybody got into the boat.

“No, John,” he had said to his friend. “You sit there — on that double cushion — and steer. Belge says he can’t row if he’s not given a couple of oars. I take one, and Davison the other. Gidlow, you shall take my oar if I faint; otherwise you will please consider yourself a guest.”

Such a day had never come to him before. The heir of the Graycotes had served him with delicate food and sparkling drink; had waited upon him, Gidlow, the garden boy! He had been lost in admiration of the gentlemen in their simple but graceful boating costume. He had felt so mean by the side of Davison, who wore patent leather boots and such a very pronounced tweed suit, such a very high collar and brilliant necktie, and a ring on the little finger of one hand. Even Mr. Graycote, and Mr. John South did not wear rings. And he, Gidlow, was among this splendid company, in corduroys and a white linen jacket and such clumsy boots.

But then, he had joined the party in character of servant, he told himself; still, he remembered what

very spruce people were the hall servants — butler, footman and page. He wondered Mr. Graycote had not brought with him that elegant page, for instance, a boy who was not of the village and who always looked so neat and was so lightly shod.

Johnny Gidlow, alias Jack of Hearts, alias Apollo, looked at himself critically. He possessed only one pair of boots, and they were on his feet. Well, but even if they were a mass of iron and coarse leather, hadn't he polished them well? He looked at his linen jacket; it was very white and clean. And his mother had pinned a collar round his neck for the occasion — a big broad collar like the ones worn by Mr. Graycote and Mr. South — stiff and well starched too; for Mrs. Gidlow got up linen for Dr. South's family regularly, and got it up very well. Then he called to mind a recent (very plain) sermon of Mr. Burton's on vanity, and blushed for himself.

Belge was still sleeping, and Johnny rejoiced that he was practically alone. He had many things to think over as he lay in the boat listening to the gentle ripple of the river and the bird-music of the neighboring wood. Once he caught a faint echo of the guitar.

The love of music had come to him when he lay, a little baby, on his mother's knee. His mother had been a singer, and her local reputation was great; but she rarely sang now-a-days. She was an old woman in appearance, though she was only three and forty. Life had not pressed so heavily upon her when Johnny

was an infant, and his ears opened out to the music of a really beautiful voice. She was fond of telling her neighbors — less restrained in their opinions of Johnny than the well-to-do — how that almost his first articulate words were — “Mammy, ting!” So she had sung to him for hours together, and to her great joy she found, as he grew up, that he had inherited her gift.

In the wood beyond, John Graycote was rejoicing in the capture of a very fine specimen of the *Xantholinus Glabratus*.

“We’ll go back as soon as you like now,” he was saying to his chum.

“What an awful beast!” exclaimed Jack, holding the underside of his guitar for the insect to crawl upon. “Don’t tell me his wretched name. Hullo! John, bottle him instantly, or he’ll bolt! Tearing a poor thing away — from his ants, like that.”

“Jack, you’re not nearly so keen about this sort of thing as you were last Summer.”

“Think not? I believe you are right. But you know the reason.”

“I can see that you are getting music-mad, old fellow, and that everything else has to give way to it. Quite right, too, under the circumstances.”

“Glad you think so, John. I’m not so sure of the rightness of it. But really, when a fellow is tingling all over with music, what is he to do? I take it that nature would not have crammed me so full of it, if

she had not intended me to let it out occasionally."

"Ah!" said Graycote, "that's just what I can't understand. You know how I love music; yet I could no more devote myself to it for a whole day together than I could spend an entire day in letter-writing."

"Oh, it's all a matter of training and development. You see, I've been brought up on music, while you are only just beginning really to like it."

"It's more than mere training, Jack; you know that very well. I shall never be able to extemporise on any instrument, other than a Jew's-harp, as long as I live; while, on the other hand, there's hardly an instrument in existence from which you cannot get music at your pleasure."

"John, if you don't get off that tack, I'll tie a big stone to the banjo, and drop it into the river, for the fishes to play upon with their fins and tails. The river floats to the sea; perhaps my lute might find its way into the hands of a mermaid."

The three lads were just sighting the water through the trees.

"Hope the Drymo hasn't spirited away our bark and its contents," said Graycote. "By-the-way, shall we lunch on board, or in that little opening of the wood?"

"In the wood — if the shade over the boat has narrowed itself within the last hour, as I suspect. Ah! bravo, Gidlow! Tidying up I see. That's right."

Johnny had whispered himself into a pleasant doze, but had woken up to find the hot sun beating down upon him. Then it occurred to him that the boat looked untidy after the half-past ten snack, and he began to put things in order. For this child of the people had a great sense of neatness — perhaps inherited from his mother, who had been waging war against dust and dirt all her life through.

“If that fat old Belge isn’t asleep still!” exclaimed South as they neared the boat. “John, I must serenade him.”

Making a signal for silence, Jack stepped softly to the side of the boat, bending for a moment over the snoring boatman with mock tenderness; then taking his guitar he assumed the stage attitude of a lover — gazing into the summer sky with a woe-begone expression of countenance which was almost too much for the spectators.

“H’sh-h-h,” whispered South to the three boys who were trying to suppress their laughter — “He might wake, you know.”

Then Jack began the softest of tinkling preludes, and casting his eye upon an imaginary star, sang the following pianissimo —

“Happy be thy dreams,  
Sweet Belge!  
Over rippling streams  
Summer starlight gleams  
And music’s golden themes,  
Sweet Belge!  
Re-echo through thy dreams.”

It would be hard to say which of the three lads laughed the loudest as South, still standing by the boat side, caressed the guitar more and more tenderly, and kept his eyes fixed on the afternoon sky. They could repress their mirth no longer. Gidlow was lying in the bottom of the boat choking with laughter, and even John had thrown himself upon the grass. Davison made the wood ring with loud guffaws.

The deep ground-bass of Belge's steady snoring was not a greater contrast to the tinkling of the lute, than was the fat perspiring face and wide open mouth of the man to the love-lorn countenance of the musician. Jack was just thinking out another stanza, when a sudden lurch on the part of Belge showed that he was on the point of waking.

In a moment South disappeared up the bank, and ran behind a tree.

Belge's dazed expression of countenance as he looked about him produced a fresh burst of laughter, in which South joined heartily. Johnny Gidlow turned his back to the man who was stretching himself out and talking sleepily to himself as he tried to rise. Johnny wished that he could creep into one of the hampers in order to laugh unseen. He was afraid Belge would think they had been making game of him.

"I did think they'd cum to fetch me, sure-ly," the waking man exclaimed, blinking his eyes a good deal. "I 'eerd the 'arpers 'arping wi' their 'arps — quite plain like. But I didn't feel as if I was a-going just

then; one on 'em know'd me by name, for he said 'Belge, swate Belge,' I think it wor."

There had been a rapid consultation among the boys.

"He's had a vision of angels," said Graycote to South.

"Then, for pity's sake, don't dissipate it," whispered Jack, at the same time beckoning Gidlow to come ashore.

"Let's all go a little way into the wood," he urged, as Davison and Gidlow climbed the bank.

Belge was a Methodist. At the next meeting of the "Class" to which he belonged, his "experiences" were worth listening to.

Now fully awake, Belge gazed around him. He was quite alone, he found, and not a sound came from the near wood. Looking about, he sighted the guitar case.

"Ah!" said the old Puritan, sighing heavily, "truly the pipe and the taybor is in their feasts. No meddar escapes their riot. 'Ow little sich lads know o' the booty of Zion. It's just as it was in the days o' Noah — eatin' and drinkin', marryin' and gi'ing in marriage — and so forth."

Ah, Belge! Belge! when you know you over-ate yourself this morning, and drank at least a quart of ale! For Graycote was right when he said nothing had been forgotten. There was a fair supply of ale for Belge, as well as lots of lemonade for the boys.

"'Ow can the songs of Zion sound in the ears o'

the worldlin'?" Belge asked himself as he reflected on his waking dream. "Verily I heard the Lord's song in a strange land. . . . I wonder now when they'll be back for dinner."

Belge was an unconscious humbug. He had not a suspicion of his own inconsistency. He had two or three tracts in his pocket, one of which he had determined to bestow upon John Graycote. It was entitled, "Have you got your ticket?" He had been thinking that Dr. South's son needed something a little stronger. How he wished he had brought a copy of "Hell-Fire Jack, or Plucked from the Burning." He felt sorry now that he had allowed himself to be carried away by young South's music. Perhaps he'd play that "fiddle thing" again; Belge would then seize the opportunity for a word in season on the songs o' Zion.

Belge looked at his watch; it was a little after two o'clock.

"Time is on the wing," he remarked sententiously, and yawning somewhat. "This 'ere weather do make a workin' man thirsty."

It was making some playing boys thirsty too, and they were returning, a merry party, from the wood.

"Belge!" shouted Jack from the bank, "hope you slept well? Ready for some luncheon?"

"Well sir," said the boatman, touching his hat, and smiling in spite of his fear of South's eternal reprobation — "Axing your pardon, I calls it dinner."

"A meal by any other name will taste as sweet,

Belge," returned Jack, "we're going to take the things into the wood. Would you prefer to remain here?"

Jack saw that Belge, the stout and sturdy, seemed loath to leave his cushions.

"If it's all the same to you gentlemen, I would," said the boatman, who saw another nap in prospect, and (possibly) another vision.

The four boys were hauling the hampers out of the boat.

"Leave him a chicken and some salad and a slice or two of ham and one of those veal pies," said Graycote to Gidlow.

"Don't forget the beer, John"—put in South, "he appreciates that. And, Davison, give him one of your cigars."

Davison, who was now in uncommonly good spirits, gave the boatman a couple of cigars and some fusees. Belge, quite overwhelmed with an abundance of good things, could only smile feebly, touch his hat repeatedly and murmur thanks indiscriminately.

No time was lost in spreading the meal on a mossy place in the wood. Johnny Gidlow was trying to prove himself handy on the occasion. His mother had given him two rules of conduct for the day, and he was observing them faithfully. One was, "Don't speak till you're spoken to;" the other, "Don't forget your manners." Both rules or cautions were unnecessary as far as Johnny was concerned.

"Strawberry!" exclaimed South, letting off lemon-

ade corks like so many pistol shots. "This is worth coming for. Gidlow, where are you?"

Johnny, having placed everything in reach of the diners, had removed himself to a distance. He felt sure they would leave him enough to eat. Hearing South calling him, however, he ran as fast as he could, only to hear the Doctor's son chide him in his serio-comic way. "Gidlow! this is meanness. Nay, it's treachery. You know that we are all apoplectic, and you thought to leave us to perish miserably. Surely you remember what Nelson said: England expects every man — and of course every boy — to do his duty. He made no exception in favor of you."

South motioned him to a place by his own side, and Johnny sat down, smiling through his blushes.

"Heed not the vulgar joint of fat and lean," said Jack, breaking into an unpremeditated strain of blank verse. "There are who say, beneath yon flaky paste — lurk livers of the geese with dainties fed — until said livers bulge with unctious food — fit for the palate of a child of song. Such children are we both, and therefore, my young Apollo, we'll just divide this paté between our musical selves. John! for this so dainty cate, great thanks. Methinks you *catered* with a wondrous skill; and, if I might trouble you for one of those bottomless (in-one-sense-only) bottles of by-no-means-exciting-but-altogether-refreshing and touch-the-spot nectar, I think we shall be able to galvanise Gidlow into life and song."

## CHAPTER IV

### A GOLDEN AFTERNOON

“The woods were fill’d so full with song,  
There seem’d no room for sense of wrong.”

—Tennyson.

“Surely you remember my weakness for tea?”  
Graycote was saying.

“Well, John, provided that the weakness is for, and not in, the tea, I’m with you.”

At a convenient distance from the spot where they had lunched the boys were fixing a gipsy kettle over a lighted fire. The fishing was over, and Graycote had startled Jack by announcing, “Five o’clock tea punctually at six.”

“It’s all part of the experiment, Jack. You remember my saying this was to be an experimental party?”

“Yes, John. Pray go on making experiments. I like them.”

“So glad,” ejaculated Graycote, coughing a little, as he inhaled the smoke of the burning wood in his efforts to see if the kettle had begun to boil. “You see, ladies always appreciate tea so much, and I wanted to find out if it could be managed at this forthcoming water party.”

“John, you’re graduating as a model host. You are surpassing yourself. But don’t put your spectacles into the steam more than is necessary. I’ll sing out when the kettle boils.”

Davison and Gidlow were unpacking and arranging cups and saucers in the near distance. They had collected materials for the fire, and set it alight in an incredibly short time.

“We must have music over our cups, as is fitting,” said Jack.

“To be sure,” assented Graycote, “full strength of the company, and all that.”

“If you could remember that the wind, such as it is, is blowing from the south-east, and that consequently the smoke—”

“Dear me, yes,” said Graycote, shifting his position.

“It’s important to know which way the wind is blowing,” said the philosophical Jack with significance. “In your case it is of particular importance, or will be some day.”

Graycote looked at Jack South enquiringly. Like the river yonder, the doctor’s son was always breaking out in a fresh place.

“Remove the boiling kettle of popular fury from the fire of discontent, and the result is — tea.” Jack was holding the kettle in his hand. “Where’s the pot?” he enquired.

"Jack, these are dark sayings," said Graycote, holding the teapot while his friend poured in the boiling water. "I'm not sure that I quite follow you."

"Never mind, old man, you'll have to do so some day. Let us to our cups."

When Jack had tasted his tea, he pronounced it excellent and said to his friend, "Don't forget, John, that the quality of the tea depends very largely upon the removal of the kettle at the right moment."

"Another dark saying, Jack."

"Perhaps. Suppose we have a series of light sayings to the music of the guitar. Gidlow, what will you sing?"

But Johnny was looking as though he had lived on cherries to the exclusion of the milk. His repertoire of songs was limited to the few his mother had taught him. Of hymns and anthems his memory held a store inexhaustible. South began to strum over some popular melodies on his guitar. Johnny knew the melodies, but had no notion of the words.

"Never mind," said South, passing from one tune to another without a moment's pause, "We shall hit it directly."

He fell back upon opera music, and as he strummed a pretty melody from the "Caliph of Bagdad" he noticed a sudden new flush in Gidlow's face. "Apollo! haven't I struck the lyre in the right place?" Johnny

shyly confessed that he had. South was wondering to what words the little country lad would sing this gem from the "Caliph."

"It's called," said Gidlow, in a trembling voice, "O come ye into the Summer Woods."

"What could be more appropriate!" exclaimed Graycote.

"The very thing," rejoined South. "Hearts, my friend, I'll lead up to it forthwith."

It was a more than faltering voice that raised itself in the woodland to the praise of the surrounding beauty. A few seconds, however, and the notes were steady, strong and sweet:

"O come ye into the Summer Woods  
There entereth no alloy."

Charged with the fulness and ripeness of an Italian summer, the melody rang gloriously through the English woodland. Once the spirit of the music seized him, the singer knew not what it was to falter. The tender accompaniment of the strings followed trippingly.

"But what of the sleeping beauty?" asked Jack excitedly, when the song was over, and the singer had been applauded, literally, to the echo.

"Meaning Belge?" asked Graycote.

"Of course. What a shame to forget him, even if his appearance does suggest that he prefers the cups that inebriate."

"Perhaps Gidlow would take him a cup of tea," said Graycote. Johnny was in attendance immediately.

"Send him the teapot," suggested South, "it may help to wake him up for the journey home." But when Johnny came to the river bank, he found Belge lying under the shadow of a great tree, sleeping, snoring and perspiring. The sunlight on the boat had become too strong for the dreamer of dreams. Lying near was an empty wicker bottle that, in the early morning, had contained one gallon of very good home-brewed. Johnny shrank from disturbing the unwieldy man, but left the teapot and a cup and saucer standing within his reach.

After that the birds in Tishley Wood grew mute, for the place began to thrill with human song. Flute and guitar were constantly in demand, and each of the four boys contributed his share of vocal music. South and Gidlow (after many suggestions on the part of the former) hit upon a duet, which, as Graycote said, "made the birds blush for their own discordance, and sent them to roost an hour before their usual time."

But the home-coming was memorable. Belge was awake when the boys reached the waterside — awake, but stupid.

South suggested, in an undertone, that the boatman had been trying to stable a nightmare.

"Perhaps the second vision was of demons," said Graycote, shaking the empty beer jar. But a very lit-

tle rowing served to push the boat down stream, for the wind was rising and the current strengthening.

Johnny Gidlow lay back in the boat and thought of Paradise. It seemed to him that he had passed into it that day and that the memory of it would never leave him. He was not sad, even though the day was well nigh over. How much he would have to tell his mother! And then a pleasant thought was haunting him, a thought to which he scarcely liked to give shape, but which was taking a deeper and deeper hold upon his mind. It was the thought of South. Johnny was sure the doctor's son must be one of the cleverest and nicest boys in the whole world. Yet this young gentleman had not only been kind to him, but had noticed him continually during the day and, more than once, had praised him warmly. It occurred to him that if ever he fell into any great trouble, he would run to Mr. South and say, "Please Sir, I'm very sad because this or that has happened, and I've come to you, because I couldn't help feeling that you'd do something for me."

The motion of the boat was soothing and pleasant, and the long sunlight lay in a fiery flood upon the surface of the water. Bird melody seemed to have broken out afresh as they sailed past dreamy meadows and quiet corn-fields scarcely touched with the lovely gold that tells of autumn ripeness. Only Belge was depressed. Davison had for some time been sharing in

the general conversation. But Gidlow lay and listened, and was happy. They were yet a good half-mile from home, when South suddenly stopped the stream of fun to say to Graycote:—

“John, shall we sing an evening hymn? We have had such a good time, it seems—I mean, I think we ought, you know, to—how shall I put it? Well, perhaps, to ‘say grace’.”

Graycote assented immediately.

“What a puzzle Jack is,” he thought to himself, “I should never have thought of such a thing. It must be that home-training of his.”

Without saying another word, Jack had removed his hat, taken up his guitar and played the opening bars of the hymn—

“God who madest earth and heaven  
Darkness and light—”

Graycote and the other boys uncovered reverently as the sacred song rose upon the air of the quiet river.

Guard us waking, guard us sleeping,  
And when we die,  
May we in thy mighty keeping  
All peaceful lie:  
When the last dread call shall wake us  
Do not thou our God forsake us,  
But to reign in glory take us  
With Thee on high.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FRIGID ZONE

How still the evening is,  
As hushed on purpose to grace harmony.

It had been in the bond that Jack should dine and spend the evening at the Hall. He had left instructions for his “black-and-whites,” as he called them, to be sent up to the Graycote’s, so that he could dress there after the water-party and appear in the great dining-room with decorum and punctuality.

Although Jack was wont to speak of the Hall and its environments as the Frigid Zone, he was good enough to admit that it had graces peculiar to itself. He loved to dine there on a summer evening.

On this particular night, as the small party of Lord and Lady Graycote, Mr. Burton, John Graycote and Jack himself, crossed the great entrance hall with its polished marble floor and lofty columns and entered the dining-room, South confessed to himself that the scene was a pleasant one.

On a desert of polished oak, glowing here and there with a warm gleam of carpet and rug, stood a table that, in the soft candle-light, might have been mistaken for a snow-drift covered with flowers, or a little island

of fair light and color standing amid the gloom of a perfumed lake. For the sides of the room lay in shadow, a shadow only broken by the four tall candles on the sideboard; so massive a structure that, with the old painting of St. Sebastian hanging above, it might well have been mistaken for an altar. The three tall windows at the end of the long room faced the west, and there a crimson after-glow burned brightly, promising an undying gleam of daylight to the brief darkness of summer. Only the lawn in the near distance lay in sombre gloom.

The sense of perfect repose and subdued beauty was delicious, following upon the bright lights of an August day and the glare of summer sunshine on field and river. Nor did Jack regret the necessity for controlling his over-boisterous merriment and the task of listening rather than of conversing.

Only, Lady Graycote could not allow him to do all the listening. He was a greater favorite of hers than he wotted of—a remarkable fact, seeing that her ladyship was difficult to please and made heavy demands (too heavy for some) upon the patience of her visitors.

Jack had scarcely ever taken the trouble to ask himself whether he liked Lady Graycote; all that he had ever thought of in her regard was that she was a woman—old enough to be his mother—and therefore demanding great respect and reverence and being worthy of all the small attentions he could pay

her. This was Jack's theory and practice in reference to all women, irrespective of rank or age. A theory and practice inherited from his father, and one impossible to improve upon.

Lady Graycote was not a beautiful woman, and she rendered herself ghastly in facial appearance by the use of a single eye-glass. Jack thought it suited her very well, particularly when she was driving; but he admitted that its use heightened the death's-head appearance of her ladyship, and, on the whole, rendered her remarkable but not attractive.

To-night Lady Graycote is impressing upon everybody the extreme absurdity of supposing that she could venture to indulge in anything of the nature of a picnic on land or water. Of course the big water-party must come off, and she would exert herself to make it a complete success; but to expect her to eat and drink in an atmosphere of flying and creeping things was, etc., etc.

"Oh," put in Lord Graycote, "there are places in Tishley Wood where the midgets swarm not, and ants do not exist."

"A sufficient supply of carpets and cushions," suggested the Rector, "will transform even Tishley Wood into a pleasant retreat."

Lady Graycote shivered slightly: "One would feel so uncomfortably like Queen Elizabeth," she said.

"But then she was dying, not dining on cushions, mother," interposed John.

It occurred to South how very like some portraits of Queen Elizabeth was Lady Graycote. He wondered the coincidence had not struck him before. He tried, however, not to dwell upon the thought as he turned to her ladyship and said:

“Why not have a little tent put up, Lady Graycote? A big one, of course, if you preferred it. Then the midgets would not have a chance.” Lady Graycote was charmed.

“But, my dear,” exclaimed his lordship, who saw in the suggestion both trouble and expense, “why go to Tishley Wood to lunch in a tent? We might as well run up a marquee on the lawn.”

“Why lunch in the wood at all?” asked the heir. “Why not have an awning fixed up over the barge, or lay a table on the covered part and eat there? Better still, of course, buy or hire a house-boat.”

John had fixed his mind upon a house-boat; but his father did nothing without counting the cost. The Rev. Mark Burton, who had endeared himself to Lord Graycote by holding “moderate views” on subjects outside theology, asked the boy if he had any notion as to the cost of a house-boat.

“Well,” said the youngster, “it’s not as if you had to buy a new one every season.”

“That’s true of all kinds of expensive things,” said the parson.

Lady Graycote who, by the way, had never really had the smallest intention of trusting herself to any

kind of a boat, or suffering herself to lunch anywhere out of doors, begged her husband to make his own arrangements. Any plan would suit her, she declared.

Jack rushed into the threatened breach by expatiating on the delights of lunching on the cool river—"well protected from the sun, and catching the delicious breeze at every moment."

Lady Graycote was amused. Putting up her glass to look at Jack, she smiled graciously upon him, at the same time remarking—"So like a boy!" (It seemed to the lively mind of Jack as though she were trying to find out if he had not become a man since the removal of the soup.) "So very like a good boy." (Jack devoutly hoped he was, but didn't say so.) "Not fearing neuralgia, nor regarding draughts"—her ladyship continued—"nor reflecting that what is to him and to his kind merely an agreeable coolness, might in my case prove to be the harbinger of terrible suffering."

Lady Graycote dropped her eye-glass, and, as it chanced to touch a pendant jewel in its fall—thereby producing a sound akin to the sudden bursting of a glass vessel—Jack felt penitent. For the moment it seemed to him as if he had deliberately struck Lady Graycote.

In another moment, however, Jack had recovered. Swallowing a mouthful of claret and water, he reflected that, if her ladyship had happened to be a boy, he would have recommended a glass case.

"I'll undertake to prevent all the draughts, Lady Graycote," he said with decision.

"Then my mother will faint," said young Graycote. But the Rector created a diversion by putting an entomological question to his pupil, and Jack resumed his conversation with Lady Graycote, managing, however, to change the subject.

"Had her ladyship cared for the pictures of that year?" he asked.

"We saw so little of the Season," Lady Graycote answered. Jack knew very well that the Graycotes never remained in London for more than a week or two, and that their town house had been let on a long lease.

"I find picture galleries more trying every year I live," her ladyship went on pathetically. "One hour at the Grosvenor, and I am prostrate."

"Your ladyship heard some music, I am sure," asked Jack when he had duly condoled with his hostess's infirmities. If there was one thing Lady Graycote would sacrifice herself for, that thing was music.

"We heard Pergolini three times," she said with something approaching enthusiasm. "You know my weakness for the violin. The man's playing is ravishing! Happily, too, each time we heard him in a drawing-room. You don't know how I shrink from going to concert-rooms and public halls."

Lord Graycote at the other end of the table was wondering what gave a fearfully overcrowded draw-

ing-room the advantage over a comparatively cool and spacious hall.

He only laughed, however, as he asked:

“Was Pergolini the man who insulted Lord Edward?”

“To be sure he was,” rejoined her ladyship, and then, turning to Jack full of the eagerness with which a good story inspires a person of limited (and sometimes unlimited) conversational powers, she said:

“A most ill-bred person, this violinist, who conducted himself in a perfectly shocking manner in the Duchess of Darnley’s drawing-room.” Jack looked at her ladyship with something like alarm. Had the great Italian appeared in the Darnley circle drunk and disorderly?

“You will remember meeting Lord Edward Pankin?” Lady Graycote said; “he was down here last September.”

Jack had not forgotten him, he answered, trying to catch young Graycote’s eye.

Hadn’t Lord Edward offered to bet them two to one in ponies that he would stand on his head in the middle of the billiard table and sing a song of his own composing—“Ripping through the row on a wall-eyed tit.”

“Difficult not to remember a young man of so many accomplishments,” Jack thought to himself.

“Well,” said Lady Graycote, “you know how passionately fond of music Lord Edward is?”

Jack bowed. He was wondering if perchance Pergolini had declined to accompany Lord Edward in "Ripping through the row."

"It was at one of the Duchess's very biggest parties," her ladyship went on, "when Pergolini—who I must say was playing divinely at the moment—turned suddenly round to Lord Edward, who may perhaps have struck a bass note on the piano just before—turned round upon the Duchess's own son and shrieked, literally shrieked!—'Be quiet, you fool . . . !'"

Lady Grayscote sank back in her chair, put up her glass and looked at Jack, as who should say—"When have you heard anything quite so horrible as that?"

Jack deliberately dropped his napkin, making a dive for it at the same moment. John was blushing furiously. Lord Grayscote and the Rector were discussing the new foreign policy.

"Did Lord Edward apologise?" asked Jack after a slight pause.

The dropping of the eye-glass made such a clatter, Jack felt sure that it must be broken.

"My dear child!" exclaimed her ladyship; "either I have told the story wrongly, or you have misunderstood me."

"Jack has over-exerted himself to-day, mother," young Grayscote said hastily, at the same time casting an appealing look at South. "Don't worry him now,

or he won't be able to play Chopin for you later on. Oh, and he's got his guitar with him and a new ballade, to say nothing of an improvised serenade, and I don't know what."

Lady Graycote looked at her watch and rose immediately. "I must repeat my story some other time — sleepy boy!" she added, touching his shoulder with her fan as she passed him. "Why didn't you tell me it was getting late?" she asked Mr. Burton as they all left the dining-room together.

As the two boys crossed the hall, Jack whispered to his friend:

"If I'd been Pergolini, I should have punched Lord Edward's head."

"I should have tried," rejoined Graycote.

There were no traces of sleepiness about Jack, as he sat down to the big Broadwood and ran his fingers lightly over the keys.

"Frightfully out of tune as usual," he thought to himself; "I wish people wouldn't economise in such matters as these."

Lady Graycote had taken a low seat by the fire, for in spite of the hot weather her ladyship insisted upon a fire in the drawing-room. In spite of the fire, too, she wrapped a light woollen shawl about her shoulders and took on her lap a big Persian cat that had been lying on the hearth-rug.

Music did not exactly bore Lord Graycote, but it cannot be said that he was an enthusiast in the art. It

was, on the other hand, the one thing Lady Graycote cared for very much. As for Mr. Burton, he was known throughout the diocese as "the musical Rector of Graycote." As a curate he had done wonders in choir-training, and now the choir of Graycote Church had become famous.

Jack South was thinking of this, as he sat at the piano playing Lady Graycote's favorite nocturnes. He was thinking of other things, too, in connection with the Rector's choir. He had said to John that they must put their heads together about Gidlow; but talking matters over with his father afterwards, Jack had become acquainted with one or two startling facts which he was determined to discuss with the Rector. Jack had decided not to speak of these things to young Graycote until he saw how the information affected Mr. Burton. Dr. South had his own reasons for not wishing to talk to the Rector on a matter of this sort.

When, then, the last song had been sung, and the last bar of Chopin played in the Graycote drawing-room, Mr. Burton and Jack South left the room together.

"I suppose," said Jack, after a little conversation about choir music, "I suppose you are very proud of your soloist, Gidlow."

"Oh," said the parson a little coldly, "a boy ought to be thankful for the privilege of being allowed to sing in a church choir."

"Certainly, sir," returned Jack with great respect, "in one sense that's very true."

"In every sense, surely!" said the Rector a little sharply.

"Well, sir, however that may be, I'm afraid you will be losing him soon."

"What do you mean?"

Jack felt that he was rousing the good man.

"Mitchell's agent was in the Church on Sunday evening," Jack said, speaking very deliberately, "and I'm told he was delighted with Gidlow."

"Who is Mitchell?" demanded the Rector.

"Oh, he's the man who gets boys for the London theatres and opera houses. They are paying very high prices just now at the Odeon — salaries that a country boy would jump at. Then there's that new Roman Catholic place in London. Mitchell is working for them also, and they give —"

"But Gidlow is not a Roman Catholic!" gasped the Parson.

"That's true, but —"

They had arrived at the Rectory, and Jack having shaken hands with the speechless Parson, ran off before the latter could question him further, leaving the bewildered man staring at his own gate.

## CHAPTER VI

DR. SOUTH

How the world is made for each of us!

How all we perceive and know in it  
Tends to some moments product thus,  
When a soul declares itself — to wit,  
By its fruit, the thing it does.

— *Browning.*

If any one family in Graycote received its full meed of fresh air and sunshine, that family was Dr. South's.

From an early hour in the morning until long after sunset, the doctor's garden, shrubbery, lawn and orchard rang with happy talk and merry laughter. We are not, of course, prepared to say that no mopish or melancholy person ever entered there; but we do assert that if there was one place in the wide world where poor Prince Arthur's "young gentleman"— or ladies either — were never sad "for very wantonness," that place was presided over by Dr. and Mrs. South and was called Graycote Grange.

Nearly four hundred years ago, a veritable monastic grange stood upon the spot over which Dr. South is strolling at this very moment. Not a vestige of the old building remains with the exception of this bit of stone wall which is doing duty as a support to the orchard gates.

Dr. South, stopping to admire the effect of the

morning sunlight on the red campion and ivy clinging to this atom of stonework, is conscious of a light step behind him, and knows by a sure instinct that Jack is flying down the garden which separates the lawn from the orchard.

The Doctor turns round with a look sunnier than the morning itself, if that be possible, and catches Jack on the wing—so to say. The boy submits like a four-year-old to having his short curls pulled by his father and exclaims—

“Yes, dad, I am late; but you don’t know how tired I was.”

The Souths kept early hours in the summer months, but at mid-winter, and especially during the month or six weeks after Christmas, they were not so careful in this matter.

“We had such a short chat last night,” said the Doctor, laying his hand on Jack’s shoulder and passing into the orchard—“that I was a little anxious to ask you more about the Rector. Did he seem disturbed, Jack?”

“Frightfully, dad. Shouldn’t wonder if he’s still standing before his gate.”

“I shall go to him directly after breakfast,” said the Doctor, his bright looks vanishing for a moment. “We mustn’t forget who he is Jack, must we? Remember, old fellow, he gave us Holy Communion on Sunday.”

The Doctor’s arm tightened affectionately on the

lad as he said this, and there came a look of seriousness over Jack's face.

"A priest is always a priest," the Doctor went on, "but Mr. Burton is not always Mr. Burton. Still Jack, I am glad you spoke to him last night and that you said to him what you did say."

"Have you made up your mind what to advise Mrs. Gidlow?" Jack asked after a short pause.

"Not quite, dear. I should be sorry for the lad to leave Graycote, unless the Ancinian Fathers got hold of him. I could not in conscience regret that. But I'm afraid he's just a bit too old for their purpose."

"He's only thirteen and a-half you know, dad. At any rate, I know he isn't fourteen."

"Is that so?" asked the Doctor. "Why he looks more than a year older than that. I forgot to ask Mrs. Gidlow his exact age. In that case—" but he hesitated.

"There's two good years of singing in him, I'm sure," said Jack. "And don't you think his after chances are good?"

"Exceptionally so. One may be wrong of course; but if a voice of that exceptional quality doesn't develop into a superior tenor, I shall be much deceived."

"What seemed to touch the Rector most," exclaimed Jack, laughing at the recollection, "was the possibility of Gidlow becoming a Roman Catholic."

"I can well believe that," the Doctor replied, shaking his head. "If Mr. Burton had only been a good Anglican Catholic, bringing up his choir-boys in the practice of every Catholic duty, I should not have said what I did say a moment ago. But our unfortunate Rector seems to be getting more 'moderate,' as he calls it, every year of his life. Under the circumstances, I would dissuade no one in this parish from submitting to the Roman obedience."

Jack looked up sharply at his father; he had never heard him admit so much before. He knew that the Doctor was what is called a "very advanced Ritualist," and he remembered that somebody had once remarked upon his father's "Roman sympathies," but Jack was surprised at the change that seemed to have taken place in his dad's mind since the Christmas holidays.

"But let us go to prayers, Jack," said the Doctor, turning on his heel as a bell rang out over the lawn and garden and orchard. "We never do anything more profitable in this world."

The family met every morning in a room fitted up as an Oratory. Directly after prayers, they assembled at the breakfast table.

"What can have brought the Rector out so early?" asked Mrs. South as a servant announced "Mr. Burton to see Dr. South."

Jack caught his father's eye for a second, but said

nothing. Just for the present he and his dad held a secret; which secret, however, had been shared with Mrs. South.

“I’ll go to him at once, dear, if you’ll allow me,” said the Doctor to his wife, looking half amused and half anxious.

“Certainly, dear. Jane, where did you leave Mr. Burton?”

“In the little drawing-room, ma’am,” said Jane; “Emma was dusting the big drawing-room,” she added.

A significant smile passed between the Doctor and his wife. Even Jack would not have understood this — if he had chanced to note it.

The Doctor vanished, and the eight or nine remaining people (nine to be accurate), broke into merry comments upon this early pastoral visit. Jack was sitting by his mother. His eldest sister Minnie took her father’s place for the moment.

“Is it wine for Mary Large or quinine for Edward Shaw, I wonder?” asked Kitty South, commonly called Kit, and who in earlier years had often been mistaken for Jack. Kit was a year younger than her brother, but the likeness between the two was remarkable.

Jack was describing the water party to his mother.

“I hope it’s not a sudden accident,” exclaimed Matilda, generally called Matty and not unfrequently Mat. Matty was a sympathetic girl, two years older

than Jack and much resembling her eldest sister Minnie.

“I think, dears, this is the day for the Ruri-decanal Conference,” suggested Miss Burgon, the governess. “Is it not the first Wednesday in the month?”

“Miss Burgon, you are always well up in clerical arrangement — when is the parish school-feast coming off?” asked Minnie.

“By which she means the bun-fight,” explained Kit, looking at Jack for approval of the phrase and avoiding Miss Burgon’s glance of disapproval.

“It is invariably on or about — on or about,” repeated the governess trying to make it clear that she was not speaking rashly of a thing that depended largely upon the state of the weather — “on or about the second week in September.”

“Isn’t that a little late in the year?” questioned Miss Flynd, the lady visitor who had remarked on “the dear little boy,” etc., etc., and who (with her sister Bertha and their father and mother) was spending some time at Graycote Grange.

“Our school treat is always in May or June at the latest,” said Bertha Flynd.

Minnie, sitting at the head of the table, began to explain in her own bright way the various complications and circumstances which had gradually tended to push the school treat later and later in the year.

“Please correct me, Miss Burgon, if I have made any mistakes,” Minnie said, looking laughingly but

affectionately at the middle-aged governess, who was a well appreciated institution at the Grange.

Miss Burgon immediately began to offer some trifling emendations of the narrative as originally given by Minnie; which emendations were interrupted by the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Flynd.

A ripple of laughter greeted the elderly couple — painfully conscious that they had surprised their hostess as well as their own daughters.

“It’s my fault, dear Mrs. South!” exclaimed the lady in a voice surprisingly clear and strong considering her apparent age.

“But surely, my dear,” said Mrs. South rising, “Ann did not forget you?”

“We sent her away three-quarters of an hour ago,” said the old gentleman, proud of the feat of appearing at a nine o’clock family breakfast. “I shall insist upon Mrs. Flynd doing this every morning. No more bed-room breakfast parties, Mrs. Flynd!” he said to his wife as they took seats on either side of the table, “If only I could get the Doctor on my side! But Oh,” he went on, a laughing eye contradicting his pathetic look, “what a thing it is to fall into the clutches of Mrs. South!”

Then the combined strength of the South (and the Flynd) family fell upon Mr. Flynd with a torrent of questions, expostulations and prognostications, and as he listened the old man seemed to grow younger by forty years.

Dr. South, sitting opposite to the Rev. Mark Burton in the little drawing-room, detected a faint echo of the merry hubbub in the breakfast room and longed to return. But the Rector made no sign of going away. Miss Burgon had been right about the Ruridecanal Conference; but not even an Archidiaconal one could have moved Mr. Burton at that moment.

He was deeply, painfully hurt, he had just said. He looked deeply and painfully angry.

“What I cannot understand is why Mrs. Gidlow should have come to you, Dr. South, in a matter affecting my interest so closely.”

The moment he had uttered the words, the Rector felt that he had exposed his hand. This did not tend to make him more comfortable.

Dr. South made no reply. He looked like a man who had already said his say and had nothing either to subtract from, or add to it. But he was astonished that Mr. Burton should admit in so many plain words what (implicitly at least) he had so often denied.

“I cannot understand the extraordinary interest you have in this case,” the Rector said petulantly.

Dr. South thought the number of things his visitor “didn’t understand” might be multiplied almost indefinitely. What the Doctor said was as follows:

“My religion teaches me to love humanity. I might say that it also teaches me to love Art. Any system of religion that teaches the utter neglect of either one or the other, my conscience rejects. If

you, as a clergyman of the Church of England, assure me that that Church regards neither the love and sacredness of the human species, nor the love and sacredness of Art — then I reject her. Do I make myself clear, Mr. Burton?"

Dr. South, whose gentle humor had made pale ladies of fashion smile in spite of ailments, real and imaginary — whose kindly sympathy with the suffering poor had made rigid features relax and poor pulseless hearts beat with the accession of new hope — whose tender handling of sick children and the winsome whimsicality of his tone and manner had made him a longed for visitor instead of a dreaded doctor — this Dr. South, it seemed, like his son Jack, could break out in fresh places when the occasion made it necessary. No person in Graycote had such profound respect for the sacerdotal character as the Doctor had. No parishioner of the Rev. Mark Burton had ever defended the questionable sayings and doings of his parish priest as Dr. South had defended them — at home and abroad. At the same time, nobody had more clearly defined views of the practices of justice and charity than the man who at this moment was confronting the Rector of Graycote.

"The fascination of the Scarlet Lady," began Mr. Burton — the Doctor had risen from his chair.

"The Archbishop of Canterbury himself should not use such an expression in my house without listen-

ing to my protest.” The Doctor had spoken with warmth.

Mr. Burton also rose, and as he did so his eye caught a picture, the sight of which had startled him as he was being shown into the little drawing-room half-an-hour ago.

The picture was a new one. Its subject was the Virgin Mother of God. Below it on a small table of white marble and gilded wood, stood a bowl of white roses, flanked with choice lilies in tall Venetian glasses.

“I am beginning to understand everything,” said the parson bitterly. A less courteous person than Dr. South would have expressed his pleasure at this assurance.

“At this moment,” the Doctor said with firmness, “I am as much a layman of the Anglican Church as you are a priest of that Communion.”

The Rector waited for more, but the Doctor was silent.

“That being so,” the former broke out at length, “how you can coolly acquiesce in an arrangement which means nothing less than the handing over of a young lad to a system that you are bound to regard as the Devil’s masterpiece for the destruction of souls, is—is—well, is something I cannot understand.”

Oblivious of his claim to a general comprehension of the whole business, and proud of a bit of rhetoric that had done its duty on many a Protestant platform, the Rev. gentleman sat down, as though expecting

the burst of applause to which he felt himself entitled.

Alas! the reporter has to record "ironical laughter," instead of "loud and continued cheers."

The Doctor was himself again. Watch in hand, and shaking with suppressed mirth, he turned to the parson, and said—"I never thought to hear that phrase again; least of all from you, Mr. Burton. Forgive me if I ask to be excused. Old Shaw was a little worse last night, and there are three or four others waiting in the surgery."

"This has been a most unsatisfactory interview," exclaimed the Rector, taking up his hat almost savagely, "I will see Mrs. Gidlow at once, and the lad also. This affair must not proceed, Dr. South."

"Johnny is quite ignorant of the whole matter," was all the Doctor said in reply. He thought the parson looked a trifle relieved.

"So much the better. There is one difficulty the less. Not, of course, that he would venture to question my right over him."

"Your right!" the Doctor ejaculated, still holding the watch in his hand, while his eyes and mouth gave signs of coming mirth (if the parson would go on saying funny things) and present humorous surprise. "Pardon me, my dear Rector, if you ever had a right in him, which I am disposed to question, it ceased when Johnny began to earn his own living. No doubt the abolition of serfdom is not so thorough as it ought to be, but—"

But there came a sharp knock at the little drawing-room door.

"Please sir," said the parlor-maid, "they have sent to say that Edward Shaw is dying."

The Doctor did not even wait to show Mr. Burton out.

## CHAPTER VII

### JOHNNY GIDLOW

Nor call thy spirit barely adequate  
To help on life in straight ways, broad enough  
For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.

— *Browning.*

In justice to Mrs. Gidlow, it ought to be explained that the poor hard-working woman had no active dislike of her parish priest. She knew so little of him and saw so little of him (out of stall and pulpit) that her feelings towards him could only be of a negative or passive sort. He had called upon her twice within the last year — once to complain that Johnnie had been late for a choir practice, and on the second occasion to suggest that the boy's hair wanted cutting. The latter complaint had not seemed unreasonable, though the ground of it was absurdly small and easily explained. The suggestion had been listened to respectfully, immediately acted upon and secretly resented. She strictly forbade the barber to give her son the "close crop," Mr. Burton had hinted at.

But when a well-dressed person, describing himself as "Mitchell's agent," called (on the Monday morning of the present week) at her little cottage, and assured her of the probability of her child's success in

gaining any one of the various engagements and appointments he described in detail, the good woman knew not how to answer him. She needed advice sorely and, acting on her first impulse, had explained the entire matter to Dr. South.

The Rev. Mark Burton, hurrying away from the Grange to call upon Mrs. Gidlow, began to prepare his rhetorical attack. Conscious of being in a particularly angry mood and desiring to curb his anger quite as much from conscientious motives as from the wish not to damage his own cause, the parson determined to begin by appealing to Mrs. Gidlow's feelings as a Protestant mother. It was true that he had over and over again objected to the application of the word Protestant to his branch of the Church Catholic; he forgot that objection in his eagerness to prevent the destruction of a soul and the loss of the only really good voice in his well-trained choir.

When, however, the parson reached the Gidlow's cottage, he found to his intense annoyance that Johnny's mother was "not at home," and this in a much more real sense than could be said of some of his lady parishioners when he made his appearance in their entrance halls. Inquiries among the neighbors proved to him that Mrs. Gidlow had left the house "betimes in the morning, before some of them were up and about."

The Rev. Mark Burton would almost have quar-

relled with Lord Graycote at that moment — genial and attractive and full of tact as the Rector was within the precincts of Graycote Hall.

His conscience was quite at ease in the matter of that dying man. Edward Shaw was a Methodist, and though Mr. Burton regarded every man, woman and child in Graycote as his parishioner, he could easily absolve himself from pastoral duties where his ministrations were not acceptable. But the Ruri-decanal Conference? He had particularly desired to be present at that. The village clock was striking ten, and he had six miles to drive! Should he drop the Conference? he asked himself. Would it be worth while to ask Lord Graycote to interfere in the matter of Gidlow? A brief, a very brief reflection convinced him that it would not. On the other hand, he saw that the mere relation of such a case, if it did not make his lordship angry, would bore him exceedingly. So the Rector of Graycote went to the Conference. But though the drive to Cowpool gave him time for quiet thought, and the meeting of the Rural Deanery tended to distract his mind, the day did not prove a happy one.

The old Vicar of Cowpool — the clergyman who had spoken to Johnny in the choir-vestry a year or two before — was an advanced Ritualist. Mr. Burton knew that the old man had acquired a reputation as confessor and director of souls, and that more than one of the Graycote laity found their way to “ Father ”

Hunton's vicarage for the practice of that auricular confession which the Graycote rector, high-churchman though he called himself, disliked and denounced. Now Dr. and Mrs. South, at least, were among Father Hunton's penitents. Mr. Burton knew that on the authority of Dr. South himself. Under such circumstances, the Parson of Graycote was not disposed to make a confidant of the Vicar of Cowpool, though they were neighbors at the luncheon that followed immediately upon the Conference. And to speak to his other neighbor of what he so much wanted to discuss with somebody was altogether out of the question. Mr. Burton was sitting next to his host on the left hand side of the table; the clergyman to Mr. Burton's left was president of the local branch of the Church Association and had quite recently denounced the services at Graycote Church as "operatic performances" and the Rector of Graycote as a "dissembling Romaniser."

"Father" Hunton was not the very old man he seemed to be. He had been Vicar of Cowpool for more than thirty years, and though his parish was the smallest in the rural deanery, consisting only of some two hundred and fifty souls, his labors had been heavy and his life ascetic. His reputation for spirituality was well deserved. His enemies, and they were not few, admitted that Mr. Hunton, at one time the hope of every high-churchman in the diocese, had lived to see himself distrusted by many of his brother

clergymen who professed to be working in the interest of the "Catholic Revival." Some spoke of him as a stick-in-the-mud Tractarian; others as a man "too dangerously Roman to be safe." Nevertheless, Mr. Hunton had a great following, wrote more letters on spiritual subjects than many a so-called "Leader of the Movement," heard more confessions than his neighbor made sick calls, conducted a greater work for souls than the parsons sitting round his table at this moment had any idea of. But this was not all.

Mr. Burton was thinking, as he sat in the semi-monastic dining-room of Cowpool Vicarage — thinking a little uneasily of a certain institution founded by his host years before, an institution in which Dr. South took the keenest interest and one which owed its great success largely to the efforts and personal liberality of the Vicar and the Doctor. The Cowpool Choir-School was a beautiful reality, and under some circumstances no one would have appreciated its existence more than the Rector of Graycote. But when Johnny Gidlow had been a little boy of nine, Dr. South proposing to Mr. Burton that the child should be sent to this very desirable and very suitable place, had unwittingly moved his parish priest to such bitter remonstrances on the subject that the Doctor had given way, and the matter had never come to the ears of any member of the Gidlow family. In his generosity the Doctor had excused Mr. Burton very readily, thinking it quite natural that such a musical clergy-

man should be loth to part with so rare a commodity as a faultless boy-soprano.

In a similar matter the Doctor had not given way so readily. There had been a great Choral Festival at the Cathedral, and the Graycote Choir had been present amongst the large number of country choirs assembled in the mother-church of the diocese. Both the Rector and the Doctor were there, and in a little chat with the Dean at the end of the ceremony, South remarked in his laughing way that Mr. Burton possessed a greater treasure than even the Cathedral choir could produce.

“Ho-ho!” said the Dean, “we must rob him forthwith. We are looking everywhere just at this time for even a decent voice.” And the Very Rev. gentleman turned to the Rector of Graycote with considerable eagerness.

“Oh! Mr. Dean,” said the latter, “the lad would not do for your purpose at all. Quite an uneducated little rustic, you know. Reads music very imperfectly. Would be frightened to death in a place like this. Quite useless, Mr. Dean, take my word for it. Not at all the kind of boy for you.” Mr. Burton spoke with so much certainty that the Dean was convinced.

Dr. South turned away in disgust. Only a week before, in the Doctor’s own hearing, the Rector had boasted to Lord Graycote that the Cathedral itself could not produce a treble equal to Gidlow and that probably it never would.

These incidents were in Mr. Burton's mind as he sat at Mr. Hunton's dinner table and tried to converse with that gentle old man. They were in his mind as he drove home through the leafy lanes. They hurt him somewhat, he could not tell why, as he drove into Graycote, and, as he heard the tolling of a passing bell, he thought of Dr. South hurrying away to the death-bed of old Shaw in the early morning. Mr. Burton recalled some of the thousand and one instances of Dr. South's unselfishness — instances that had come under his own notice: and as he thought of them he was conscious of a feeling which, to a man of principle, is one of the hardest to entertain — the feeling of having acted meanly.

We have said that in the matter of the Cathedral choristership the Doctor did not easily give way. Again and again in conversation with his Rector he had returned to the subject — hoping that at least the claims of the mother-church of his diocese would appeal to that obdurate parson, even if he had no regard for the advancement of the boy. But no argument of the Doctor's had prevailed.

As Mr. Burton alighted from his trap and turned into the Rectory, the thought occurred to him that, by his own fault, Dr. South had become master of the situation.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AN ASSAULT

“If there pushed any ragged thistle stalk  
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents  
Were jealous else.”— *Browning.*

On the day following the picnic, that is, the day of the Ruri-decanal Conference — Belge was grievously unwell.

That he should lose a day’s work was not a serious inconvenience to the good man, because his work was never of a regular sort. There was no pressing need that it should be so. Belge was a man who, in the idiom of the Graycote people, had got “a tidy bit of money lying by;” yet he did not scorn a job of any kind — provided that it yielded a fair return. Nominally, he was the Hall boatman, an office that might almost have been called a sinecure. In his early manhood he had owned a canal barge, consequently he was considered a very proper person to look after the Hall boat on the very rare occasions which it was used. But on Thursday morning Belge was comparatively well. He had committed various indiscretions on the day of the picnic — sleeping in the full heat of the sun, for instance, and taking tea on an empty stomach. So he told his neighbors. Now, however, he was sorry for his lack of wisdom, and,

a much more important thing to Belge, was determined that somebody else should be sorry for at least a portion of it.

Thus the first visitor received by Davison Senior on this particular morning was Belge. Safely stowed away in one of Belge's pockets was a twopenny cigar; one of six the gardener's son had taken to Tishley. Neatly arranged in Belge's mind was a little speech he was about to make to Mr. Davison on the depravity of his son, John Davison.

Probably there are few villages in England in which some of the inhabitants do not divide their Sunday hearing of sermons between the parish Church and the meeting-house. Not that Belge did this; he was a Methodist by conviction and conversion. Mr. Davison's sympathies were with "the Chapel"; yet he seemed to owe it to his master, the Lord of Graycote, to put in a regular, if divided, attendance at Church. But the Graycote Methodists claimed the gardener as their very own and were not a little proud of his countenance and support. He was, in fact, one of their greatest men, and, as such, his Sunday morning practice was condoned.

"It's only doing as you'd be done by, sir," said Belge when both speech and cigar were delivered and the angry father had thanked Belge for his information. "We all know what comes o' smoking and drinking, Mr. Davison."

Belge knew — very well indeed. His experiences

were recent enough. But don't think Belge was dishonest on the point of that cigar. He had smoked it — and he told Mr. Davison so — quite forgetting at the time which of the boys had given him tobacco, until he saw young Davison throw away the stump of a cigar he had been smoking. The profusion of luxuries heaped upon the boatman at a particular moment will be remembered.

Yes, he had smoked that cigar, and it had caused him discomfort. At the same time — and this is worthy of notice as illustrating the number of motives that may lead to a particular action — Belge was honestly concerned in regard to the morals of young Davison. Above all things he wished to stand well in the favor of Davison's father.

"Not a edifying 'abit at any age, Mr. Davison, is it? But in a young lad — of respectable parents — it's 'eart-rendin'."

"You were quite right to come to me, Belge. I'll have a quiet talk with that young man before the morning's over."

Davison Senior kept his word — greatly to the young man's discomfiture.

"I'll give you a downright good hiding if I catch you with this sort of stuff again," — Mr. Davison had said, and John did not relish such plain speaking. It made him look and feel so very young.

But who could have split? — he asked himself; either South or Gidlow, it was clear. Even though

Mr. Graycote had not only declined to smoke but had rebuked him in the matter, Davison felt quite sure that the young lord would think no more of such an occurrence. Besides, it was not yet ten o'clock, and Mr. Graycote rarely came out before that time. It could scarcely be South either, now he came to think of it, for where Mr. John was, there was his friend. It couldn't be Belge. Of that he felt sure. It must, therefore, be Gidlow.

The picnic of Tuesday had been so pleasant an affair, that, at the end of the day, Davison felt very kindly disposed towards each and every one of his companions. But a boy's dislikes are often as capricious as his likes, and on the following day, Davison, going over all the details of the water party, had particularly examined himself on his own sayings and doings thereat. They had been negative for the most part, and that did not please him. Of course, he would be able to quote the affair when he got back to school and would be able to say quite truthfully:—"When I was rowing up the river with the Hon. Mr. Graycote, etc." "I remember saying to the Hon. John Graycote when we were walking in Tishley Wood,—," etc., etc. Also he had arranged quite a pleasant little fiction in the matter of those cigars. He would take a quantity of those "twopennies" back to school with him. How well it would sound to offer them as "the very same kind of cigars I of-

ferred to Lord Graycote's son one day, when we were out together."

All this was food for pleasant thought: but deep in Davison's mind there were other considerations at work. What a hash he had made of his singing, for instance. The others had applauded him, of course, and he could not help feeling that croaky as was his voice, it would bear comparison with Mr. Graycote's; but then—Mr. Graycote had not floundered hopelessly in the very first verse of his one song as he, Davison, had done. Again, the memory of South's and Gidlow's music was disturbing. In an effort to be critical and contemptuous, he had told his mother that they sang like two professionals! But Mrs. Davison had made matters worse by suggesting that he was giving them the highest possible praise.

When, therefore, walking-stick in hand, the gardener's son left his father's house this Thursday morning with his father's threats in his ears and without either cigar-case, pipe, or fusee-box in his pocket, the young man was not precisely brimming over with good nature. He sauntered forth, however, twirling his cane, crossed the pretty little garden that separated the Davison's house from the road, passing along that same road until he came to the Lodge at the principal entrance to Graycote Park. It was only a five-minutes walk from the gardener's villa to the park gates, and as John Davison entered the Graycote demesne, he

promised himself a solitary ramble among the oaks.

Once in the park, two roads were open to him. Either he could take the footpath on the left hand and quickly find himself alone among the deer and the trees, or he could follow the high road that led to the front of the hall. Hesitating for a moment, he chose the latter. At a particular point of the broad drive, another road branching off led to the stable-yard. Again, from this a bridle path led to the kennels, and to a sort of supplementary kitchen-garden — one of his father's latest schemes for utilising every bit of workable ground.

Davison Junior had a weakness for dogs, and although Lord Graycote had for many years given up the care of fox-hounds, there was always some interesting beast or other to be found in the kennels. Moreover, William was generally hanging about there, and Davison and William were old friends. William had given Davison his first pipe of "baccy," and the latter had returned it with interest. To-day, however, seeing that Davison Senior was a long way off, attending to important matters in the conservatory under Lord Graycote's own eyes — John Davison would draw on William for "a screw."

Alas! William was not there. But Gidlow was.

Johnny was in fact crossing the little square by the kennels with a basket of cabbage plants in his arms. He was whistling — whistling loudly and tunefully.

John Davison recognised the melody at once; Gidlow had sung it in the Tishley Wood. Davison, oblivious of the fact that Johnny had not seen him coming, concluded that the younger lad meant to be insulting.

“Stop that whistling, you Gidlow, and come here!” Johnny had almost reached the little gate that led from the kennel-yard into the new kitchen-garden. But he put down the basket at once, looking a little scared.

“Come here! you little cad!”

Johnny advanced a few steps, and his enemy met him, making rapid cuts in the air with his cane.

“What have you been saying to my father?”

“Nothing, sir.”

“You little liar! You told him about those cigars.”

“I didn’t,” said Johnny, with a suspicion of defiance in his tone.

Two stinging cuts with his cane was Davison’s retort. Johnny had put up his arms in defence, and the blows had fallen on them, leaving red weals on the not too fleshy limbs.

“Stop that, John Davison!” said Gidlow rubbing his arms and looking Davison straight in the face.

“Going to be cheeky, eh?” exclaimed the gardener’s son, surprised and angry with Gidlow’s look and tone.

“You’ve no right to hit me,” the smaller boy said,

raising his voice. "Besides, I ain't done anything."

"Perhaps not," returned Davison, "but you've *said* a good deal."

"I've said nothing about you to anybody." Johnny turned away, and began to walk back to the garden gate.

"Come here!" Davison called out with increasing anger. But Johnny had taken up his basket and was trying to open the garden gate.

It was a pity that the latch was so awkward. He placed his basket on the ground and tried with both hands to open the little rustic door. His back was towards the enemy and for whipping purposes was held conveniently. In another second a shower of blows was falling upon it.

It is a problem perhaps as to whether a thin calico shirt is calculated to deaden the force of a particularly supple rod, dexterously applied, but when the shirt allows itself to be rent, the sufferer may or may not be able to distinguish between blows that fall on the bare flesh and those that strike the linen first of all. Johnny had this opportunity of distinguishing, whether he availed himself of it or not. What he was trying very hard to do was to get out of the corner made by the gate-post, the closed gate itself and the irate Davison.

"Mind your milk — and cherries!" roared the latter as Johnny succeeded in wriggling himself half-

round. "Put your — arms down —" said Davison, between the strokes, one or two of which had been rendered abortive by the struggling. "I'll make a — pudding of your milk and cherries."

Then there came a suppressed cry which told of suffering and Davison didn't like that cry. A loud angry outburst of tears and hard words he could have stood.

But this was a long, low sob, kept under with difficulty and threatening to break out in much weeping. Very weak and cowardly on Johnny's part, no doubt; but then Johnny was a real flesh and blood boy, and not a thing made up of so many scratches of a writer's pen.

Davison had turned away, a little ashamed, but scarcely sorry.

Gidlow was leaning against the gate, his bare arms lying on the top bar and his face hidden in his hands. Of course he ought to have turned round to fight Davison on the spot. The pen-and-ink boy would have done so and have come off victorious in the bargain. Age and size and weight, and physical strength, difference of social standing, former relations between the parties — these things affect pen-and-ink lads not at all. In actual life, however, each one of them is a factor.

Davison had not struck the little lad in the face — had not meant to do so, in spite of his allusion to a cherry pudding — had not, indeed, meant to be cruel

at any point. "If lads are cheeky they must be punished; now the lad Gidlow was cheeky, therefore he must be punished."

This was the syllogism Davison had unconsciously made, and upon which he had immediately and consciously acted. That the punishment was more severe than he had intended it to be — well that was an accidental circumstance.

So Davison strolled away, the sense of shame disappearing as he found himself out of ear-shot of Johnny's sobbing. The logic of self-justification began to take possession of him.

The boy with his head bowed on the gate broke into louder weeping when he found himself alone. I am not going to say that the sense of the injustice of his beating hurt him more than the smart of his back and arms; nevertheless, the former did pain him a good deal.

"I never said a word to anybody," he sobbed out again and again, "he's got no right to hit me like that." He moved his foot uneasily, and it struck against the basket of cabbage plants. He felt that he must go on with his work, whatever his grievances might be.

But he did not hurry in taking up the plants and passing into the garden. Even when he got there, he put down the hamper and began to examine his exterior. He could feel that his shirt was torn, and he thought there must be blood on it. Happily there

was not. The back was deeply scored, and the stripes were visible through the rent linen, but Johnnie could not see them. He felt them, however, a good deal.

Once he thought he heard a scurry of light feet passing out of the kennel-yard, but he was stooping at the moment, and could not see over the wall without going right up to it, and he would not do that. He thought it must have been a dog, perhaps a couple of them, for he felt quite sure there was nobody in the kennels that morning.

He was mistaken. There had been two people in an upper room of one of the various buildings, in the kennel-yard — two people so industriously employed that, until the caning was all but over, they had been ignorant of the whole proceeding.

From what was to John Graycote a very early hour, he and Jack South had been exploring the lofts and trying to find a suitable place for a sort of rough aviary — a pet scheme of Graycote's for some time past and now brought to a head by the enthusiasm of South.

They had been wandering through room after room, now stopping to examine the lumber that lay here and there and now discussing the suitability of one apartment and the disadvantages of another, when suddenly they heard the sound of blows and a long, low cry. Both ran to the window and were just in time to see the last two or three strokes.

Jack had immediately flown to the door, but Graycote cried out so imploringly that the former turned back.

"Don't, Jack, don't! there's a good fellow," appealed Graycote, "you look murderous."

"I feel it," said Jack. Then Graycote had flung his arms about his friend, saying:—

"Then, don't you see, old man, you'll do no good, and are certain to do harm."

"No doubt about the latter," Jack said in a strained voice and trying to disengage himself from John's hold.

"You don't know what has brought it about — now do you?" Graycote went on. "Perhaps Gidlow has done something wrong."

"Perhaps!" said Jack. "Anyhow, you're right, but I can't stand seeing a sparrow-hawk attack a nightingale."

They went on talking for some time in a low voice, and for once in the history of their friendship, Graycote influenced Jack against the latter's will.

Then they waited, peeping cautiously through the window to see if Johnny had disappeared. When at last they perceived him bending over his work in the garden, they decamped.

Graycote had had the greatest difficulty in keeping Jack from going to the injured boy.

"Just at this moment, it will only make him hate Davison the more," John had argued. Jack agreed,

at the same time forming an inward resolve which, for the present, should be a secret — even from his chum.

What that resolution was is told in the following note addressed to young Davison, and which that young man found waiting for him when he returned home for dinner.

*“John Davison.—*

“I wish to meet you at your earliest convenience this afternoon. If you can show me that your treatment of Gidlow in the kennel-yard was right, I shall be sorry for his sake, but glad for yours. If you cannot justify yourself — we must fight.

“JACK SOUTH.”

“N. B.—I have not seen Gidlow himself on the subject, therefore I know nothing of his side of the question, except — that you beat him severely — and with a stick.”

“Graycote Hall,

“Thursday morning.”

## CHAPTER IX

### A STIRRING DAY

For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses  
Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses;  
And, after much laying of heads together,  
Somebody's cap got a notable feather. . .

— *Browning*.

In every sense of the word, Thursday was a stirring day for each of the four Jacks.

When John Davison read South's letter, his first impulse was to ignore the explanation demanded by the writer, and to accept the challenge. If he couldn't lick Jack South — well, he'd never fight again, that's all.

On that day, the Davison's dinner was an uncomfortable meal. Both father and mother were silent and reserved, and young John knew that they had had "words" recently. He also knew that he himself had been the cause of this domestic trouble.

Now it was important that he, John, should not fall out very seriously with his father — particularly at this time. Davison Senior had not yet given his full consent to the mother's darling project of making her son a doctor. One son was a gardener like his father, had been away from home for years and was already saving money; another was a tenant-farmer at a village a few miles away.

The elder Davison was ambitious, but not after the manner of his wife. He would have placed a son of his in any position that promised a speedy return of capital. For his son John to enter a profession, would mean a positive outlay extending over many years; the return might, on the other hand, be doubtful.

To some extent, Davison the younger had his father's gift of caution. Few men, or boys either, are quite destitute of this faculty when their interests are at stake; but to-day, as John Davison rose from the dinner table, he told himself that it would be well to think twice before answering South's letter. So he wandered out into his father's garden to think, not twice merely, but many times over, of the possible consequences of a pitched battle with the chum of Lord Graycote's son.

Davison was older and bigger than his antagonist, but then the latter was in such splendid condition. He always suggested to Davison a body made of india-rubber, for South could throw himself about like an acrobat. As for pluck — well, Davison knew that his enemy would stand up as long as he had a breath left in his body.

Then the gardener's son thought of his own fatness and the unhealthy condition to which he was reduced by nearly six weeks of steady smoking and rash feeding. What if he had to go back to school bruised and battered, or worse still, with a blue-black eye? He would not for a moment admit that there was a

chance of his coming off second-best, but he was obliged to allow that in a prolonged fight with a determined combatant some little accident of an unpleasant sort was sure to happen — to himself. John Davison was not a coward. Very careful of his own reputation, and physical well-being, he certainly was. It was not so much that he feared to meet his enemy, or that he anticipated defeat, as that he foresaw certain inevitable consequences of a painful sort, and these both in the moral and physical order.

The elder Davison was as much impressed with the wisdom of "keeping in" with the Souths as was the elder Gidlow with the necessity of not being "at outs" with the Davisons. Dr. South was very much more to Lord Graycote than a mere acquaintance. No one realised this better than the head gardener. Young John Davison had been unpleasantly reminded of it that very day. Cross-questioned by his father as to the smoking on the day of the picnic, he had truthfully admitted that neither Mr. Graycote nor Jack South had smoked, though he, Davison, had given both of them the opportunity. These facts had increased his father's anger a good deal. The gardener had notions of what was due to the "quality," notions his son thought absurdly exaggerated but which he was bound to respect — at least in the neighborhood of Graycote.

Now to fight the son of Dr. South, the intimate of Lord and Lady Graycote — to fight a boy, the

inseparable companion of the Graycote heir — received in the Graycote drawing-room and petted by Lady Graycote herself! — John Davison turned pale at the very thought of it.

Such an idea could not be entertained for a moment. But, how to get out of the business without seeming to be an arrant coward?

John felt the perspiration breaking out all over him. Sitting on the grass, he took the letter from his pocket and read it for the twentieth time.

“WE MUST FIGHT.” The words were heavily underlined.

What if South insisted! He was just a lump of determination, Davison reflected. The very handwriting of the letter looked combative! “At your earliest convenience this afternoon.” Surely, Davison thought, here is a loophole — he has mentioned no exact time or place. Only — he looked round uneasily and with a scared expression, half expecting to see the would-be-pugilist bearing down upon him. It would be like South, he knew, to seek him out, unless that note were answered quickly.

But an idea came to Davison’s mind, and one that made him rise hastily and re-enter the house. He would try to see Mr. Graycote. How to effect this without, at the same time, encountering South, was the difficulty.

It was now a quarter-past two; the Hall luncheon was at half-past one. Davison was not sure that Mr.

Graycote was at home, but he determined to find out without loss of time. Sitting down, he wrote a short and a very respectful note to Mr. Graycote, asking, almost begging, for a few minutes' conversation. Somewhat alarmed at his own boldness, he dropped the envelope into his pocket and set off for the Hall.

Going in by the kitchen entrance, he inquired for Wilkins, the butler, and finding his way to the butler's pantry he came upon the old servant just as the latter was replenishing a claret-jug for conveyance to the luncheon table.

Mr. Graycote was at home, the butler said, adding that Dr. South and his son were lunching with the family.

Davison fingered his letter uneasily.

"I suppose it wouldn't do to send this in just now, would it?" asked Davison.

"Well," said the butler, "if it's important, I'll take it in myself; his lordship has left orders for all important letters to be taken up as soon as they arrive."

"It is rather important, in fact, very important," said Davison anxiously.

The butler took the letter and looked at the inscription.

"For the Hon. Mr. Graycote; very well. From your father I suppose."

"No, not exactly. But do you think, Mr. Wilkins, you could bring me an answer very soon?"

The butler looked wonderingly at the gardener's son.

"Well, I'll give it to him, you know, and if he sends a message — all well and good."

Davison felt grateful for this much, though his nervousness increased as the butler left him.

"I suppose Wilkins won't come back till the lunch is over," the lad thought. "But that'll be all the better, perhaps; then Mr. Graycote is sure to send a message or a note."

In three or four minutes, however, the butler returned.

"Come this way!" said Wilkins. The man showed him into Mr. Graycote's study. "He'll come to you when luncheon's over," the butler remarked as he closed the door.

At any other time Davison would have eyed the room with interest, for he had never set foot in it before. To-day, it did not look at all inviting, and indeed it was not a particularly interesting room. Specimens were everywhere — botanical, geological, and entomological, and a smell of chemicals was in the air. There were many books and much fishing tackle. A vase of roses on the writing table made almost the only bit of color in the room.

Davison sat down and tried to think how he could best put the request he had to make to young South's bosom friend. He almost wished now that he had

not come. The business began to look so ugly. He would be obliged to make confession of very doubtful deeds. Up to this moment he had thought very little of his chastisement of Gidlow — especially since the time he had betaken himself out of ear-shot of his victim's crying. Now, however, the fact was beginning to dawn upon him that he had but the poorest possible excuse for that action of his.

He would have run away if he had dared, but he was afraid that he might meet the family leaving the dining-room.

It was no good, he thought; he must stay, and brave it out as best he might.

During the twenty minutes or so that he sat there waiting, John Davison suffered.

At length, however, he heard voices outside. Jack South's was particularly distinct.

“Surely,” Davison thought, “Mr. Graycote won’t bring him here!”

But the party passed the study door, and Davison could hear Lady Graycote and South talking together. Then the door opened, and John Graycote came in.

“Good morning; you want to see me?”

His tone was freezing, Davison thought, as Graycote came up to him, looking older by several years — so it seemed to the petitioner — than he had done three days ago. Both the lads were standing on the hearth-rug.

“I hope you’ll excuse my boldness in troubling you

just now, sir," began Davison. "It's about Mr. South."

Graycote had been studying the floor through his spectacles, but now he turned his eyes upon Davison sharply enough. The latter could not help thinking what fearfully cold, sharp eyes they were. Graycote did not speak; he was waiting, more anxiously than Davison imagined, for further information.

"I've had a note from him, sir."

Graycote was still silent. Davison hesitated about showing him the letter. It occurred to the gardener's son for the first time that Graycote might have seen the note before it was sent off. It was dated "Graycote Hall." At any rate, South's chum was sure to know something of Gidlow's chastisement.

"You know what happened this morning, sir?"

"Yes," said John, again bringing his spectacles to bear upon the floor.

Davison had already asked himself how South could have heard of the matter, seeing that Gidlow had not told him the story. But of course, the little cad had gone blubbering all over the place, telling everybody, so that the thing would soon reach the ears of South.

"It would never do, Mr. John, to — to —" Davison was fingering the open letter, still hesitating whether to put it into the other's hand. The heir of Graycote stood impassively enough in appearance, but in reality burning with anxious curiosity. How Davison wished that Mr. John would do a little of the talk-

ing! As they stood there in silence for a few seconds, a door opened in the distance, and there came a crash of pianoforte music, followed by the impassioned singing of some wonderful melody. Graycote recognised it as the grand Cavatina in *Semiramide*. But the door closed again, and a quiet afternoon silence prevailed in Graycote's study. Both the listening lads had recognised South's voice, and both were relieved.

Without further hesitation Davison handed the letter to Graycote.

Three minutes afterwards John Graycote entered the drawing-room. Jack was in the middle of a pianissimo passage as his friend came in and sat down on the first available chair — sat down to listen and to wait. The Cavatina was finished. Jack was singing a few bars of Adalziza's music in *Norma* — only a few bars in order to lead up to the passion music of the Arch-Druideess herself. Graycote started as the music changed, suddenly and swiftly, and Jack's sure fingers swept the keys in a kind of whirlwind, while his voice became charged with all the wrath and scorn of which it was capable.

“If he will only spend himself thus,” Graycote reflected.

Lady Graycote and Dr. South were listening breathlessly, as Jack seemed to gather new force from the awful passage. The instrument at which the singer sat trembled under the weight of his vigorous pound-

ing. Graycote was scarcely a musical critic, but he saw that Jack was punishing the Broadwood too heavily.

Could Jack see Davison's head on the keyboard?

John looked at his friend, and thought he had never seen him looking so pale, and at the same time so scornful, as at this moment.

But relief came with the finale, though Jack did not linger over the pathos of the concluding bars as he had been wont to do.

"My dear boy! you quite frightened me," exclaimed Lady Graycote, as Jack rose from the piano. Young Graycote had risen and was whispering to his mother, for as Jack had turned his pale face upon the company his friend saw that it was blanched and ghastly.

"Certainly, John," said Lady Graycote aloud, "go outside for a little while. Pardon me, dear, I was very selfish: it was much too soon after luncheon for music of that sort. And of course, you boys have been running yourselves to death all the morning."

Dr. South was looking curiously at Jack, half-minded to take his son's pulse. But Graycote was hurrying the latter out of the room.

"I'm all right, John," the pale musician said, as his friend took him back to the dining-room. "Good of making a fuss!"

"You haven't a particle of color left in your face, Jack."

"No more have you, for that matter. And you

look scared, to boot. John, something's happened! What is it?"

Graycote went to the window and looked out.

"John, something's up!" Jack rushed to the window. "For goodness sake, tell us what it is? Look here"—Jack took out his watch—"I've an appointment in—"

"That's just it, Jack," cried Graycote, facing round.

"Just what?"

"That appointment of yours. You can't keep it, Jack!"

"But you don't know—"

"I do know," Graycote said, in a deep, determined voice. "Davison's in the house."

"The sneaking brute!" South ejaculated. "I'll thrash him within an inch of his miserable life. What business—"

"Do listen to reason, Jack," said Graycote, trying to put his arm in that of his friend.

"I'll listen to anything you like when I've licked that bully of a Davison."

"Jack, do be reasonable for a moment. You know this fight cannot come off."

"Who says so?" Jack had shaken himself free of his friend, and was standing at bay with his back against the sideboard. "Who says it can't come off? Now look here, John—" South lowered his voice and fixed his dark fiery eyes on his friend, while his face became rigid with half-stifled rage. "Listen,

John! I gave way to you this morning, and don't regret it. But you mustn't try to come between me and Davison twice in one day. I will fight him, and he shall fight me!"

Jack turned to leave the room, but before he could do so the door opened and Dr. South entered. "Thank God!" Graycote muttered under his breath, slipping quietly out of the room, though determined to stand sentinel at the door.

"Tell me all about it, old fellow," said the Doctor, taking hold of Jack's wrist. "Something's gone wrong, Jack," he added, looking at his watch. But the father did not show his anxiety at the terrible beat of his son's pulse.

Jack turned his head away for a moment, he felt that, unless he made a great effort, he would give way to tears. The re-action was setting in.

The Doctor led him to a chair, and took one by his side.

"You and John have had a little quarrel, eh?" the Doctor asked. But Jack could not trust himself to speak. He was wondering what his father would say to this business, if he knew all. He would have told him about it — though, perhaps only when the fight was over.

But now — Jack would tell him everything — and at once.

"It's a clear case of bullying," said Dr. South when Jack, calmly though indignantly eloquent, had finished

his story. "In some circumstances, quite the case to justify a fight."

"I thought you'd say so," cried Jack excitedly.

"But here, and now, you mustn't think of it. Remember—I won't say the Graycotes—but your mother. At school it would be different. Even mothers know that such things must be—sometimes. But don't you see, Jack, that in Graycote a regular stand-up fight between the gardener's son and yourself would be sure to give scandal."

"But we could have it out in some private place, dad."

The Doctor shook his head. "You would find that the report of it would soon leak out of your private place. No, old man, it can't be. Have some explanation from Davison by all means, and let John Graycote be present. Get to know what led to the assault—what Johnny Gidlow had done to provoke it. You have assisted at school councils, haven't you?"

"Yes, dad." Jack had been woefully down until this moment; he began to brighten a little now.

"Very well then; you and Graycote examine the case in form. Both of you have a sort of right to do so. It will be much better than making a fuss about it—speaking to Lord Graycote or even to Davison's father. Insist upon some sort of compensation, and if you have any particular difficulties, come to me. I shall be at home soon after six."

Dr. South rose, pulling one of Jack's curls by way of adieu and saying — "I shall trust you in this matter, Jack. How's the pulse? Ah, better, decidedly. Mind those outbursts, my lad; they are dangerous in two ways. You know what I mean." Jack put his hand in the Doctor's, and looked up into his face.

"Thanks, dad — I'm awfully sorry. I was in a frightful wax."

"Where's John?" asked Dr. South, opening the dining-room door. Graycote was looking at a painted window at the end of the gallery, but came running up immediately.

"It's all right," the Doctor said, as he shook hands with both the lads, and prepared to leave the hall. "Put your heads together, quietly, and see what you can do: Jack will explain."

The Doctor went back to the drawing-room to assure Lady Graycote that his son was recovering and that John and Jack were together in the former's study. He had seen them move in that direction.

But, as a matter of fact, Jack was not there — for the present at least. John had persuaded him to wait a little while before seeing Davison. Jack had consented gladly.

Davison had been waiting anxiously. It was now long past four o'clock.

"Mr. South will not insist upon the terms laid down in his letter," said Graycote, to the gardener's son.

"You mean, sir, that he won't—I mean that he does not wish to—that is—"

Graycote would not help him out. He could not bear the sound of the word "fight;" so, after a slight pause, he said quickly:

"The letter was, of course, written in a great hurry and apparently very soon after he had witnessed that painful scene in the kennel-yard. He will be here in a moment to talk the matter over."

Davison was aghast. It had never occurred to him that any living person could be in those disused rooms, or, indeed, in any place of vantage within the neighborhood of the kennels!

"There are several points to discuss," continued Graycote, looking at the perturbed Davison and putting on quite the air of a County magistrate. "Perhaps I ought to tell you at once that I myself saw and heard something of this affair. But I will find Mr. South, if you will excuse me for one moment."

Davison, once more alone eying the specimens, wished emphatically that he hadn't applied to Mr. Graycote. It was something, of course, to be rid of the (possibly painful) necessity of fighting, but to sit there and be browbeaten by a couple of lads, both of them his juniors, was more than he had bargained for.

He had, however, little time for reflection. Graycote returned with South almost immediately. Davison eyed the latter curiously and was almost shocked

at the unnatural expression of his face. Could that be the boy who, a day or two ago, was making Tishley Wood and the whole riverside, ring with laughter and song?

"I am forbidden to fight you, Davison," Jack began as soon as he entered the room. "My father has forbidden it. I want you to understand that."

Graycote looked distressed. He had hoped that Jack would sit down quietly and that the business would proceed with a certain amount of form. He was afraid Jack would bring the thing to an end summarily.

"Why did you thrash Gidlow?" demanded South. Graycote pushed a chair towards his friend, but South did not perceive it.

"Well, Mr. South," said Davison in an injured tone, "he had been sneaking. Then he told me a lie, and when I reminded him of it he was cheeky."

"You are sure of all this?" South's dark eyes were fixed upon the gardener's son and the latter felt them. Faltering somewhat, he gave his reasons for supposing that Gidlow had told Davison Senior of the smoking. No one else could have done so, he added.

Jack was puzzled. Reflecting that he would be able to settle that point later on, he said:

"And you thought these offences justified you in committing a serious assault upon a small boy? You know, of course, that the Gidlows can prosecute you, if they please?"

Davison paled visibly. The fight would have been better than this, he thought to himself. Egged on by young South, there was no knowing what Gidlow's father and mother might not do. Visions of County magistrates — Gidlow's enraged parents — his own irate father — newspaper paragraphs, etc., passed before Davison's mind and prevented him from replying to South's question.

The silence that followed was broken by a question from Graycote.

“Had Davison seen Gidlow since the affair of the morning?” The reply was a muttered “no.”

South had been walking up and down the room — less excitedly than he had paced the dining-room, it is true. Suddenly, however, he stopped and made a signal to Graycote, and the two left the room.

## CHAPTER X

### A FEAST OF RECONCILIATION

“There’s difference as I take it, betwixt the clattering o’ swords and quart pots, the effusion of blood and claret wine — the smoke of guns and tobacco.” — *Cowley.*

There was in Graycote Grange a queer little room of fair dimensions, opening out of the principal staircase by one of those architectural freaks only found in an ancient house. For years it had been known as the “Dust Bin,” or “Jack’s Bin,” as also the “Bin o’ Jack,” and the “Jackobin.” Jack South always declared that his sisters could call it what they pleased, so long as they kept it in order when he was away and permitted him the use of it when he was at home. Now, as Jack was greatly loved by these same sisters, and as he did not presume upon their affection by affecting to treat them as mere nuisances, they never let an opportunity slip of doing the very thing they knew would give him pleasure.

For a time at least, Kitty South, who, as we have said, was a year younger than Jack, pretended to be the sole guardian of “the Bin” in Jack’s absence; but one had only to inspect this very desirable den to see that whoever was its custodian, not one of the sisters had been absent at its decoration. Every holiday, in-

deed, brought its new feature of interest to the room, which, by the way, Jack had recently threatened to re-name the "Gold-dust Bin;" though, in truth, there was little enough of the precious metal to be found in it.

But Jack's idea of gold was seen in the big water-color drawing of Raphael's St. Cecilia, which occupied the place of honor, and was the work of Minnie. Hanging on the walls, littered over the mantelpiece, and erected on brackets, were many smaller water-color drawings, pen and ink sketches and photographs — from portraits of the boy Shakespeare, sturdy and thoughtful, and young Milton, almost angelic in his refined beauty, to Paul Jullien, the wonderful boy virtuoso, and the youthful Liszt.

Kitty's artistic work is easily distinguishable for — tell it not to Miss Burgon (because she knows it already, poor lady) — Jack's youngest sister has a turn for caricature. Here is the tiny child Mozart proposing marriage to the already grown-up and beautiful Marie Antoinette; here is young Sebastian Bach copying his stolen MS. by moonlight. There is a touch of pathos in these; but look at "Haydn's Disgrace," the latest work from Kitty's pencil. One hardly knows if she wishes to emphasise the "Serve him right," or to excite one's sympathy. The big chorister-boy stands in the old sacristy, with his hands behind him, protesting that he will leave the choir rather than submit to the indignity of being caned on

those same hands; and the hard-hearted Chapel-master, knowing that the lad's voice is breaking, coolly answers him that he may go where he likes when he has had his punishment. There is irresistible humor in the turn of the uplifted cane, the determined look of the man and the very obstinate clasping of the boy's hands behind his back.

To-night Jack is hiding away this spirited sketch, for he is expecting visitors. And among the said visitors is a chorister boy who has that day been caned and another boy who has acted the part of caner. To neither of these will such a picture suggest pleasant reminiscences, Jack thinks.

Metaphorically, at least, the Doctor's son is raising a dust in the little "Bin." We say metaphorically, because of actual dust there is little or none. This is not Jack's fault, however. Stipulating that no servant should be allowed to enter the room with broom or duster, at any rate during the holidays, Mrs. South gave way on the understanding that Jack himself would keep the room tidy. Visiting the Bin in person a week later, Jack's mother had been horrified to find it covered with matter out of place. Henceforth no entreaties of her son prevailed with Mrs. South to forbid periodical dusting and sweeping on the part of the housemaid.

But in clearing the writing table, putting books on their shelves and piling-up music, Jack is working with characteristic vigor. The little pianette at the

end of the room creaks under the weight of all sorts of odds and ends that have no right to be in the room at all. However, Mrs. South had generously given way in the matter of litter, and did not insist upon apple-pie order. There was a proper place for bats and racquets, all the same.

• • • • •

It is nearly half-past six, the time at which the visitors are due, Jack reflects. He has done a fair amount of work since four o'clock. Rushing from Gracycote Hall with a well-defined intention of finding Belge and demanding if he had abused the hospitality of Davison by reporting him, Jack had encountered Mrs. Davison herself, taking a solitary afternoon walk. Seeing that she looked troubled and fancying that she wished to speak to him, Jack stopped and, in his ready way, shook hands with her. That she was Davison's mother scarcely occurred to Jack. He was only conscious of the fact that she was a woman and a mother. She began at once to speak of her son and, to Jack's delight, of the smoking episode. Had South seen her son smoking before or since the day of the picnic? she inquired anxiously.

Jack forgot everything in the pleasure of assuring her that he had not. At once she spoke of Belge and the information he had given to her husband that morning. Jack felt so happy that he was ready to anathematise Belge for his perfidy, in the presence of Mrs. Davison at least; for South rejoiced that Gidlow

had not acted the part of informer. But it was clear to Jack that he had relieved Mrs. Davison's mind, and when he left her he found himself more kindly disposed towards John Davison.

"Think of your mother," the Doctor had said that afternoon. Jack had done so, and returning to Graycote's study he was thinking of Davison's mother. Above all things he rejoiced that the good woman was ignorant of the events of the day.

And now matters progressed rapidly. Davison's confusion was greater than ever, when Jack told him of the real informer. The gardener's son gave in and threw himself upon the mercy of his judges. As Jack expressed it to his friend afterwards, Davison ate humble-pie by the ton. He would make any apology, tender any compensation, offer any reparation, that Graycote and South could suggest. Then Jack became generous and forgiving. When Davison volunteered to seek out Gidlow and ask his forgiveness, making at the same time a substantial peace offering, Jack exclaimed:

"Bring him round to the Grange afterwards. We'll have a feast of reconciliation."

But Johnny had made such haste to leave the Hall grounds after his work was over that, although Davison left the study as the clock was striking six, he could not find Gidlow among the group of work people who were slowly moving towards the village. Could it be that Johnnie had gone home early in the

day — ill and suffering? Davison noticed the elder Gidlow among the laborers on the road, but he could not bring himself to speak to the man whose child he had injured so recently and who, no doubt, was acquainted with the whole matter. So Davison hesitated for some time, not knowing how to proceed. Turning into his own home he encountered his mother. He would not tell her everything, he thought, but he must needs ask her for certain things he had promised to bestow upon Johnny.

South had reminded him of the torn shirt, suggesting a new one in its place, and anything else of the same kind Davison could conveniently offer. The gardener's son knew there would be little or no difficulty in obtaining such things as these, but the "substantial sum of money" Graycote had suggested, would not be so easy to get.

Making up a small bundle, and leaving it where he could find it later in the evening, Davison set out for the place where he knew from his own past experiences the village lads played cricket. Johnny was not getting his innings, indeed he was not playing at all. Lying on the grass apart from the other lads, he was looking lonely and disconsolate, making now and then a miserable attempt to nibble a slice of thick bread and butter. Seeing Davison bearing down upon him hastily, the lad rose and looked round in a despairing sort of way, as though seeking for some place of retreat in the big meadow.

“Don’t!” Davison called out —“Don’t run away. I want to speak to you. I want,” he said coming close up to the puzzled lad and taking his hand —“I want to beg your pardon, Johnny; I want to ask you to forgive me.” Then Davison led him away from the field, down the long lane to Park Road and to the gardener’s house. At first Johnny hung back, and for some time he walked unwillingly; but Davison talked and coaxed incessantly, though he was disturbed by his companion’s obstinate silence.

But in a little while Davison mentioned South’s name, and gave to the wondering lad South’s message and invitation. Then Johnny voluntarily put his hard little hand into Davison’s, looking up into the latter’s face with an expression which said very plainly, “I forgive you.”

They were late in getting to the Grange, where they found Jack in a high state of pleased excitement and Graycote making himself useful in a capacity to him both novel and interesting. The South’s family dinner was in preparation below, and the servants were busy enough, Jack knew. Consequently he had promised his mother that this extempore meal in “the Bin” should give as little trouble as possible to the household.

“Just a few sandwiches, mother, and — well, a thing or two in the tart line, you know”— he had said, hoping secretly that his mother would extend the “thing or two,” as only she was capable of doing.

“If there is any fruit”—he added, to Mrs. South’s amusement—“or any dessert things going”—

It was in vain she pointed out to him that he was robbing Graycote of a comfortable dinner. John was present, and protested that an indoor picnic would be the delightfulest treat possible. Moreover, he would help Jack to carry the things upstairs. He had been keeping his promise nobly; though to be sure he had not far to go, for a servant brought the trays to the foot of the staircase, and Jack would allow him to carry nothing that looked heavy. All the same, Graycote had nearly come to grief under the weight of a dish of cheese-cakes.

“Now, John, you’ve done enough for one night,” Jack was exclaiming as Davison and Gidlow reached the entrance hall of the Grange.

“I don’t want to have to pick up your mangled remains from a mass of crushed pastry and broken crockery. It would make a fellow sticky and uncomfortable, to say nothing of the chance of cut fingers. Broken your specs of course! No? What a wonder! John, you’ll never do for a page-in-waiting. You must take a lower seat. This for instance”—Jack led his friend to the only low-cushioned chair the Bin contained.

“Isn’t that comfortable?”

But before Graycote could respond, Davison and Gidlow were in the room, both smiling, but disinclined to venture beyond the doorway.

“Now, don’t stand looking at us as if we were an exhibition,” cried Jack, making a rush at the pair of them and pushing them in the direction of the sofa — an article of furniture South declared he could sleep upon — was always resolving that he would utilise as a bed, though he invariably changed his mind when bed-time came.

“I am delighted to see you both. So is Mr. Graycote.” John had risen and was standing aimlessly, near the piano, beaming through his glasses, and hesitating whether he ought not to shake hands all round.

Johnny was wondering if the “Bin” was some little banqueting hall, used, perhaps, by the Souths on particular occasions. He felt himself blushing a good deal, but he was too happy to be uncomfortable, though he had not quite shaken himself into the new-old clothes provided by Davison.

South had disappeared for a moment, and Graycote found himself tongue-tied. But after a short time he remarked: “An interesting room this, isn’t it?” Davison had been mentally comparing it with the “study” at Graycote Hall, rather to the disadvantage of Graycote’s den. Before he could reply, South danced into the “Bin” with two dishes of fruit in his hands.

“First fruits!” he exclaimed, placing the peaches and apricots in the centre of the table. “Almost too beautiful to be eaten; nevertheless, only the stones shall survive to tell the story of the slaughter.”

Then declaring that the "scratch meal," as he called it, was only waiting to be eaten, he handed plates to his guests, bidding them retain their seats and proceeding to carry round the toothsome plenty with which the writing table was heaped.

"It's really wonderful what my mother can do, when she gives her mind to a thing," he said. Graycote was thinking how wonderful it was that Jack should be able to make peace as readily as he had declared war; for John thought lightly of his own share in the pacification.

It was a merry meal enough, though Jack was a little disappointed at Gidlow's silence. Later on he saw with delight that Johnny was really appeasing his hunger and that the lad was thoroughly happy, in spite of the unusual surroundings in which he found himself.

"I hope you'll give us some Chirps later on," said Graycote as Jack came round to him for the tenth time with a fresh delicacy.

"John! what do you mean?" asked South, with affected surprise. "Confess that you've been rummaging!"

"I confess. Didn't you give me leave years ago?"

"Of course. But I say, John, you must have swept the top of the piano with your spectacles to have found that book."

"Then you were trying to hide it? I thought so.

How very mean of you not to have mentioned it in your letters."

" You revealed all the secrets of your own prison-house, didn't you?"

" All except my learning of the flute."

" And I — all, except the writing of the Chirps. How now, John? say we're quits."

" I will," said Graycote, laughing; " but as I have given you the questionable pleasure of my tootling on a former occasion, I can reasonably demand the unquestionable pleasure of listening to some of your so-called Chirps. Whyever did you give them that name, Jack! I expect they are much more like warbles than chirps."

" Don't be complimentary in advance, John. Wait until the Sparrow jumps on his perch and opens his beak. At present he's engaged in testing the flavor of a ripe peach. Now, nightingale!" said South, addressing Gidlow — " this fruit was grown for unfeathered birds of the boy species. You can't eat too much of it, seeing that it's ripe. Davison, do set us all a good example in this matter. Those peaches are blushing from pure consciousness of their own beauty and flavor."

Two of the boys were certainly blushing with — perhaps a mixture of self-consciousness and pleasure; but Jack set them such a perfect example of the method of attacking ripe peaches, at the same time abandoning

himself to such a spirit of gaiety and fun that the guests in the dining-room could hear peals of laughter from the "Bin," and were moved to merriment in consequence. Once or twice it had occurred to Graycote that the people below were laughing in chorus with the boys. He thought it was a little like antiphonal chanting of a very pleasant kind.

Jack had been telling some school stories, which appealed strongly to the interest and sense of humor of everybody present; and Gidlow had at one point become so choked with laughter as to find courage to murmur—"Please don't, Sir!" Whereupon—Jack, having assured him in an absurdly solemn manner, that, "as far as he knew, he hadn't touched him"—Johnny began to show symptoms of apoplexy.

"The rows we had over the title of this manuscript book of songs," said Jack in answer to a reiterated question of Graycote's anent Chirps, "would fill a folio, if anybody would be foolish enough to write an account of them. Two or three of the contributions are not mine, so that I had to submit to all kinds of suggestions of titles on the part of interested people. One fellow, who wrote quite the best thing in the book, wanted to call the collection *Hoots*, or *Owl Hoots!* Failing that, he said *Cock Crows* wouldn't be bad. But a gushing young person—whose sister has actually published a volume of poetry—was rendered lastingly unhappy because I would not call the thing

*Warblings at Eve.* (Now do be quiet, John; I assure you there isn't a warble in the whole book.) Then a young man — who, by the way, ought to have known better, seeing that he had just been birched for cutting a gas-pipe — said he'd withdraw his contribution if I didn't entitle the book *Pipings*. *Twitters* was a favorite with some, and I lost a promised, but I am persuaded, a never-written set of verses, because I wouldn't hear of *Caws*. Then again, it seemed to me that *Ripples* sounded a trifle uppish on the part of youthful poets, and *Croaks*, I simply wouldn't entertain the idea of; for there's no croaking in the verses, I assure you. So in the end it became '*Chirps*, edited by Jack Sparrow.' "

Graycote, who greatly admired South's effort to put his guests at ease, wondered they had not called it School Songs, but was taken to task by Jack for his want of originality. However, when South found his way to the little piano, and the chirping began in real earnest, the heir of Graycote was fully convinced that *Warblings* would have been a far more appropriate title for the book than *Chirps*, notwithstanding the fact that a few of the songs were of a decidedly humorous nature.

Jack, taking care to select songs with easy and catching choruses, sang himself hoarse, and was almost on the point of excusing himself from further chirping, when Graycote — for the sixth time — demanded an encore.

"Why, John, this is the very stupidest one of the whole collection," South remonstrated.

"I'm sure that I speak for the company when I say that they long to hear it again," replied Graycote.

Murmurs from Davison and Gidlow corroborated the statement, and Jack once more began what he had previously warned his guests was a —

### VILLANELLE.

Three wee birds on the apple bough;  
Mother low-flying o'er fallow and field —  
"Why are ye chirping, babies, now?"

Field that hath lain under harrow and plough,  
Mother bird knows rich food will yield  
For her three wee birds on the apple bough.

"May sun-sweet showers your seeds endow,  
And O, may the leaves my darlings shield —  
Why are ye chirping, babies, now?"

"A month ago for these dainties how  
Had ye fared when frost the soil had sealed,  
My three wee birds on the apple bough?"

"Must I fly to the field of the grazing cow?  
Not yet is the wound of hunger healed? —  
Why are ye chirping, babies, now?"

"For supper 'tis all I may allow,"  
Yet three little mouths for more appealed —  
Three wee birds on the apple bough —  
"Why are ye chirping, babies, now?"

"Quite sure you don't mean four birds, Jack?" called out Dr. South from the doorway. He had been standing there for a minute or so, before entering.

“O dad!” cried Jack, turning his bright face from the piano, “just as if we could want more when all this is left”—pointing to the table. “But I’m so glad you’re come; do sing something, there’s a good old dad!” Dr. South, however, was giving a kindly greeting to his son’s guests and expressing his fears that they had fared worse than the birds.

“We are chirping our satisfaction and thankfulness, Dr. South,” said Graycote, “and all we want at this moment is more music.”

“Yes, dad,” put in Jack, “what will you sing?” But the Doctor had flown to the door, followed, however, by Jack clinging to the tail of his coat.

“I have jumped from the drawing-room frying-pan into the fire of the Jacobin,” said the Doctor, with huge enjoyment of the fun. “But what do you say to a compromise? By standing at the top of the stairs, and having your door and the door of the drawing-room left open, think you both parties will be satisfied, Jack?”

“What a joke,” exclaimed Jack; “why then, dad, you can have two accompaniments going.”

But this was too much, the doctor declared, laughingly; and eventually he was released on the promise to return an hour later.

Jack following his father’s conduct in all things, then declared that he would not give his guests more than enough, even of good things.

“You except the peaches, it seems,” said Graycote,

as Jack began to hand round the fruit; "but then you have already given us your views in regard to ripe fruit. O, you want to clear the table; allow me to help you!"

"We must have a rubber of whist, John. We needn't bother the servants, you know; all these things can be piled on the table outside, except the fruit, John! bring those apricots back again," Jack shouted as Graycote flew off with the first thing that came to his hand.

"What are trumps!" asked the cheery Doctor, coming into the Bin as the lads were finishing their last game.

"Clubs!" said Jack, with a significant look at his father, fully understood by the latter.

"So I perceive," he replied; "well, well, every card has the chance of becoming a trump at some time or other."

The last cards were thrown down, and it was declared that Mr. Graycote and Davison had the odd trick.

"Spades have been trumps most of the evening, I think," said Jack, looking at his father again.

The Doctor nodded pleasantly at this enigmatical statement.

"We have only won by one point," Graycote declared.

"The point is that you have won, John; we con-

gratulate you, don't we Johnny?" Johnny (who had been instructed in every move by one or other of the players), without penetrating the hidden meaning of these various statements, responded heartily.

But both Davison and Gidlow began to be fearful of the time of night, and to show some anxiety about getting home.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE DIMMING OF THE DIAMOND

“A youth to whom was given  
So much of Earth, so much of Heaven.”

— *Wordsworth.*

During those summer holidays the four Jacks met frequently; when both South and Davison returned to school, John Graycote continued to take occasional kindly notice of Johnny Gidlow, until the latter ceased to work at the Hall and passed into Dr. South's services.

Jack South's letters were regular but short. Graycote found them painful reading, sometimes. The following, received late in November, made him very unhappy:

“My dear John,—Just about a month to breaking-up day! Jolly glad, I tell you. Feel awfully ‘broken-up’ myself. Have just had my second birching this term! Tell you all about it when I see you. Afraid my report will be precious bad. Better luck next year. Shall keep my pecker up. Am chock full of music in spite of everything. And you know I'm always yours affectionately—Jack South.”

This, however, was the note that gave Graycote a fit of the deepest dejection, and caused such consternation at the Hall.

*“My dear John,—*

“Dad has just written me an awful letter. He and mother and sisters are starting for Mentone the day after to-morrow—as perhaps you know. I am to stop here for Christmas. Beastly hard lines—isn’t it? Only two other chaps with me. Of course it’s for punishment, and no doubt I deserve it. Sorry to miss you, John—and Christmas and—well, everything worth having. Will write you a long letter soon.

“Affectionately yours,

“JACK SOUTH.”

Lady Graycote herself took the matter in hand. Calling upon Mrs. South, her ladyship declared that Jack’s absence would spoil not only her son’s Christmas, but her own as well. Mrs. South could only appeal to her husband, and for nearly an hour and a half Lady Graycote engaged in a smart tussle with the Doctor. In the end, she won her point. Jack was to be her guest during the Christmas holidays.

The truth was that, counting upon Jack’s bright presence and his many gifts, Lady Graycote had invited a larger house party for Christmas than she had ever ventured to entertain before. She was not a good hostess, and she knew it. Jack’s absence would have upset all her plans. The boy was equal in ability to a professional musician, or a drawing-room entertainer, and of course he did not ask for fees.

• • • • •

Arrived at Graycote Hall, the ecstatic Jack enjoyed himself amazingly. And as a performer he surpassed himself. During the past term he had learned much new music, had assisted at many concerts and dramatic

entertainments, and his repertoire was at once fascinating and fresh. For four weeks Jack lived in an atmosphere of petting and applause, of luxury and self-indulgence. The last week in January found him back at school — exhausted both in mind and body.

Fresh trials and new forms of temptation awaited him. A bazaar on a particularly large and magnificent scale was to be held in the Town Hall of the county town in Easter week, and the committee had already obtained the consent of the head-master to the appearance of Jack and two or three of the best singers belonging to the school choir. Fortunately for the committee, the object of the bazaar commended itself greatly to Dr. Higham, and the fact that, though there was a week's holiday, his boys did not go home at Easter made the matter quite practical. Otherwise the Doctor would have hesitated in giving his consent. He was beginning to realise that for some time past there had been too much music and too many stage entertainments in his school. His assistant masters seemed about equally divided on the general question, according to their individual tastes and temperaments, and in particular cases — Jack's own was the principal one — the evidence was conflicting. Of the two men who had most to do with him, one was entirely satisfied both with his conduct and his work; the other, a singularly unmusical person, complained bitterly of both and had forestalled

the regular school report by answering a confidential letter from Dr. South at great length. He gave it as his opinion that the lad was being gradually ruined.

So many times during the last month had Jack been told that he was a genius — a poet and musician rolled in one — an actor of the greatest promise — that he would not have been a child of Adam if he had not been affected by such wholesale adulation. A duchess had caressed him; the heir to a dukedom had slapped him on the back and called him a rattling good fellow and equal to Grossmith; young ladies had asked him for his photograph and autograph; staid old gentlemen had, at parting, tipped him with sovereigns; Lady Graycote had begged him to regard her as his mother. Invitations had been given him by people of high position; all sorts of tempting offers for the summer holidays had been held out to him; men who knew their way behind the scenes of London theatres, prophesied for him a career of glory.

Yet the lad was sick at heart. Twice a week came loving little letters from his own mother, and each affectionate missive meant a heart-pang. Though she never reproached him, he knew that he had disappointed her. Short sharp notes came from his father — notes chiefly consisting of questions that Jack found hard to answer satisfactorily.

Six months ago how different everything had been! Music-mad even then, as he had admitted to his friend John Graycote; yet, where in the whole world of boys

could have been found a happier one! What a perfect understanding there had always been between father and son! Doated upon by mother and sisters, Jack had taken no advantage of their affection. From his babyhood he had been bright, active, alert and loving. Music had been with him always. Sweetly and jubilantly he sang before he could articulate. Melodies he knew long before he was acquainted with the alphabet. He had gone to school unusually early, partly because his parents saw that his abilities were in advance of his years; partly because the Doctor found it hard to punish his one boy for faults that could not be, and were not, passed over. But it was only lately that Jack had missed the sobriquet his father gave him at the age of two—"My sunny sonny."

The term began badly. An altercation between the boy and his master — the unmusical one, Mr. Wrupton — made Jack mutinous. With considerable skill, another master — Mr. Bray, a musical enthusiast — made peace. It was soon evident, however, that Jack could not, or would not, work. Reports of the elaborate preparations for the bazaar began to pour in. Six boys, with South at their head, were chosen to take the part of troubadours of the thirteenth century, and one morning a tailor arrived from town to measure them for their costumes of scarlet and gold lace!

As time went on, the musical schemes of the Bazaar Committee grew more ambitious. Why should not

the boys of Beechwood School perform one of their famous operettas? Why should not the whole choir take part in the concerts? And why should not Master Jack South entertain the audience as (so the Committee understood from some of the patronesses of the bazaar) he had so lately entertained a distinguished party at Graycote Hall for so many consecutive nights? Was not the object of the bazaar (the local hospital) one of the worthiest possible?

The musical Mr. Bray himself, at length became alarmed. Jack, the sturdy and hearty, was growing pale. Signs of nervousness, restlessness and great irritability were beginning to show themselves; and long before the end of March the boy was smarting under a severe birching, for what the disgusted Mr. Wrupton called “incorrigible laziness and bare-faced insolence.”

Sleeplessness now began to afflict the tortured lad, and on Palm Sunday morning he fainted as he stood in the choir-stalls chanting the Psalms. He soon recovered, but Dr. Higham insisted upon his remaining in the sick-room for a day or two. It may be that deliverance from Mr. Wrupton effected his cure. Work ceased on Maundy Thursday, and Jack was himself again. When Easter came, he closed the door of his soul upon the immediate past. The present was radiant with rose and gold.

## CHAPTER XII

### ANXIETY

“ Man hath two attendant angels ever waiting at his side,  
One to warm him when he darkleth, and rebuke him if he stray;  
One to leave him to his nature, and so let him go his way.”

Sitting at the open windows of their lodgings at Mentone, the South family talked of Jack. A letter from him and a newspaper had arrived by the second post.

The letter was short, but the newspaper report of the bazaar proceedings was lengthy enough, and both mother and father read it with mixed feelings. An entire column was given to the description and praise of Jack South’s acting and dancing.

“ It is certain,” ran the report, “ that a more gifted boy than Master South has never appeared in our midst. The young gentleman is not yet fifteen years of age, but he is already a brilliant player — not only of the pianoforte, but of stringed instruments of every description. His voice is a contralto of wonderful purity and strength and of quite extraordinary range. Nothing in the way of acting comes amiss to him. As a boy troubadour of the thirteenth century, singing the quaint and pathetic music of the period, he took the

immense afternoon audiences by storm; but in the operatic scenes given by the boys of Beechwood School, he surpassed himself in the passionate intensity of his acting as well as of his singing. This left us scarcely prepared for his successes in the lighter parts he contributed to the evening performances. As an English boy-clown or a French pierrot, he was equally mirth-provoking; but never perhaps during the four days of the bazaar did he achieve a greater triumph than in the drawing-room entertainments of Thursday and Friday afternoon. Not Mr. Corney Grain himself could have given us more genuine enjoyment. Without stage costume or accessories, clad like an ordinary schoolboy in Eton suit and turn-down collar, he took sole possession of the stage and amused a large and distinguished audience for nearly an hour and a half each day."

Dr. South frowned heavily when he reached this part of the report, but, when casting his eye down the column, he came upon a minute description of his son's personal charms, he tore the paper into strips.

Jack's father was greatly harassed. His wife's health was causing him anxiety, and much as he longed to be back in England, he could see no prospect of their return until June or July. His religious difficulties had lately increased to such a degree that, if he had been asked, he would have hesitated to call himself a member of the Church of England. He had been instructed that when abroad it was his duty to hear

Mass in “churches of the Roman Obedience,” though to do so in England would be a mortal sin of schism. The direction vexed and puzzled him. Moreover, he was unable to approach the sacraments without having recourse to an Anglican chaplain.

Correspondence on these and sundry other points with his old friend and confessor, Father Hunton, had become strangely and suddenly unsatisfactory. Was it possible, the Doctor asked himself a hundred times a day — was it possible that Hunton himself had difficulties?

And now there was this growing trouble concerning Jack. Of course the boy must leave Beechwood; but then, where ought he to be sent? That change of faith that seemed to the father to be getting more and more within the range of probabilities would necessarily entail a change of school for his son. There seemed to be nothing for it but to wait. And, in the meantime, Jack was in danger.

Another matter that was giving Dr. South some anxiety was Father Hunton’s apparent unwillingness to receive Johnny Gidlow into his Choir-school at Cowpool. It was not that he actually refused the boy, or thought him an unsuitable subject; but the old clergyman, for some unexplained reason, wished to delay the matter — indefinitely, as it seemed to Dr. South. Meanwhile Johnny himself had left Graycote Grange and was for the present attending an old established Grammar School in a little town about three miles

off, leaving his own house every morning and returning in the evening. The arrangement was working fairly well, and for some time past the Doctor had received most satisfactory monthly reports of Johnny's progress and conduct.

"You would hardly recognize our little friend Johnny," Graycote had said to Jack in a recent letter: "Not that he isn't the same simple, respectful boy he always was; but now that he has exchanged his corduroys for a well-fitting Norfolk suit, he looks the equal of any of us. I hear that your father is making an experiment with this little lad, and, though my father is inclined to laugh at it, I fancy it will succeed. Dr. South took him up just in time — when he was fresh and unspoiled. Mr. Burton is, of course, very angry; the more so for Johnny's prospect of going to Cowpool. My mother and I are greatly interested in the experiment. When will the four Jacks meet again? There's a horrid possibility of our going on a visit to Scotland in the month of August. Fancy my missing you for a whole month! However, I won't anticipate, for, though father likes the idea of being there for the twelfth, my mother has not yet made up her mind. And you know I don't want to shoot grouse."

John Graycote wrote a long letter to his friend every fortnight, but was quite content with such scrappy answers as Jack found time to scribble.

"I have written to Jack of Hearts," he said in one

of these jerky little sheets. "So glad to hear what you tell me of him. My father is delighted with the way Johnny takes to his lessons. *O si sic omnes.* I am in disgrace with the dear old Dad — again. There's something wrong with me, somehow. Can't work a bit. But I'll be hanged if I don't try to pull myself together for the rest of the term. Yes, you're right. That bazaar business did upset me. Especially the newspaper part."

## CHAPTER XIII

### FOR MOTHER'S SAKE

“There is none  
In all this cold and hollow world, no fount  
Of deep, strong, deathless love, save that within  
A mother's heart.”

Jack of Diamonds was “up” before the Head Master.

“But for the fact of your mother's bad health and the absence of your father from England, I should certainly expel you, South.”

Jack turned pale and looked at Dr. Higham with alarm.

“Hitherto you have had a good friend in Mr. Bray; now, however, even he cannot defend your persistent idleness and insubordination.”

The boy reflected that he had committed a capital error in “giving cheek” to, and not preparing his lessons for, Mr. Bray.

“During the last year you have changed in the most unaccountable way. Indeed, South, you are not the same boy at all. You are giving trouble to everybody, and your influence and example are as bad as they can be—in one direction, at least; that of making others as lazy and mutinous as yourself. Hitherto,

flogging has failed to correct you — perhaps because it was too light and too seldom inflicted."

(Jack little knew that the Doctor himself had always given orders that the strokes were to be few and light. "He is a nervous highly-strung lad," the good man had explained, "and feels pain more acutely than the average boy. It is the disgrace of a whipping I want him to feel, rather than the actual smart of it.")

Jack's face became pinched and drawn as the Doctor went on speaking very clearly, very slowly and solemnly.

"No mistaken kindness of this sort will be shown you in the future. At the end of morning schools, I shall myself give you the maximum punishment allowed by the rules of this school for a boy of your age. You may go now; but let me add — the birching will be only a part of your punishment."

Dr. Higham had spoken very calmly — even coldly; but when Jack left the room trembling in every limb, and with blanched cheeks and a beating heart — the old man showed considerable agitation.

"God help me, and the lad also," he murmured to himself; "it may be that I am far more blameable than he is. I ought to have stopped that musical nonsense long ago. And yet — with talents like his, with an artistic temperament like his, with exceptional gifts such as he possesses — what is one to do! No power on earth could stop the natural flow of poetry and music in that boy's soul. Can he help

himself in the matter? If not, why am I punishing him? Is his genius God-given — or is it not? Who is sufficient for these things! As a clergyman of the Church of England, I ought to have some knowledge of the human heart; but I have not. I can count upon the fingers of one hand all the confessions I have heard since my ordination — nearly fifty years ago. As a Doctor of Divinity, I ought to have some knowledge of theology; but I have not. For all these years I have been preaching, and yet until lately I never felt my need of the one science it is my duty to be familiar with. The most trifling case of conscience perplexes me. One complexity of character in my subjects puzzles me. Anything like an abnormal case — the present, for instance — throws me into a state of alarm bordering upon distraction."

• • • • •

In the meantime, Jack, sitting in class, was debating with himself as to whether he would run away before, or after the flogging. Knowing the boy was under sentence, his master passed him over altogether. Knowing too, what Jack himself could only surmise, that the severest punishment would follow the flogging, Mr. Wrupton felt a great pity for his unhappy pupil; for it had been settled that South was to be put into a lower form, and that he was not to be allowed to indulge in any kind of singing or playing for the rest of the term. He was even to be deprived of his place in the choir, for a time at least. He guessed

that one or other of these penalties was in reserve for him, though all Dr. Higham had said was: "The birching will be only a part of your punishment."

The entire business had come about so suddenly. This morning he could take counsel of no one. Not a boy in the school was so popular as Jack. He numbered his particular friends by the score, but his closest chum was Willie Phyler.

"I can't go without saying a word to Willie," he was thinking, "and I can't see him before the end of schools. There'll hardly be a minute's interval between the end of schools and the swishing. Well, Higham shall wallop me — for the last time!"

When the flogging was over, and Jack was making a desperate effort to suppress the sobs that would not be suppressed, Dr. Higham remarked in a tone that was almost gentle:—"I would rather you did not go to the playground before dinner. If you care to go to your dormitory, you may do so."

Jack made no answer. He was incapable of speech at that moment, and very gladly he went to his cubicle and drew the curtains, and threw himself on his bed.

Half an hour later, the school-matron came to his bedside with a tray nicely arranged with her own hands. On the plate lay a letter bearing the Mentone post-mark. The good woman spoke very few words, but they were altogether kind, and then she left the boy with his dinner and his letter.

Jack recognised his mother's handwriting and immediately tore open the envelope. This is what he read:—

“*My darling boy,—*

It is more than a week since I heard from you, and I am getting so anxious about you. Your last letter was shorter than usual and told me nothing I most wanted to know. Is my dearest boy ill or unhappy? Do write this very day, my darling. I should so like to know if you have been to confession this term. You should not wait for the chaplain to suggest it. You know, dear, that at a school like Beechwood they have to be so very careful, for only a very small percentage of the parents of your school-mates believe in confession. And of those who believe in it (so the *Church Trumpet* says) an exceedingly small proportion practise it. My darling, I am pining to come to you, but both your father and the doctor here declare that I must not return to England until July. We are thinking of going to Italy for a month or so, but I will write again when the matter is fixed and settled. You would make me better, my darling, if you could—would you not? Well, to hear from you that you are well and happy, will relieve me of much anxiety, and help me to improve in health *very much*. May God protect and bless you, my darling boy.

“*YOUR LOVING MOTHER.*”

Jack read the letter over four or five times. Then with a sudden cry, he spread it out on his pillow, laid his cheek and lips upon it and closed his eyes.

Was that the bell for evening preparation? It could not be! Jack lay and listened. He had not slept — of that he was sure, and yet he had scarcely been awake. He aroused himself now to look at his watch. Yes, it was six o'clock! On his pillow lay the letter — blotted as if it had been rained upon. By his bedside

was the tray. He was very hungry now, very cold and stiff and — sore. Without hesitation Jack arose and attacked — not the dinner that had been brought to him hours ago, but a fresh repast, evidently laid there lately; a sort of tea-dinner! So the matron had been a second time! Was it she who bent over him, and not —? but all that was a dream, of course.

Happen what might he would not run away. If for the moment he could not relieve his mother's anxiety, at any rate he would not increase it. And he would go to confession as soon as possible, much as he dreaded so very rare and formal an exercise.

Confession in this Protestant, high-church school was not an easy business, and there were only two or three boys who ever availed themselves of the Chaplain's services in this matter. It meant several days of preparation and the writing of a catalogue of faults —all the longer because anything like regular or frequent confession was strongly deprecated. For the past two years Jack had knelt at his confessor's feet once a term.

## CHAPTER XIV

### FLOW AND EBB

“Ydelnes, that is the gate of all harmes,  
An ydil man is like an hous that hath noone walles;  
The develes may entre on every syde.”

—Chaucer.

Whatever may have been the cause, Jack's life became steadier. From that memorable day until the end of the term, the boy tried to work, and he frequently succeeded.

“South is not capable of steady work,” his new master said to the Head. “Of that I am sure. He is trying hard, and of course I am satisfied. It is the effort I insist upon. I watch him closely at preparation. He begins well always; after a little while, however, I can see that he is mooning. Then he catches my eye and sets to work afresh. Unfortunately, the lad is an artist.”

“Unfortunately?” asked Dr. Higham with a smile.

“Well, Sir, I mean unfortunately as regards myself and his work.”

“There ought to be some method of dealing with abnormal boys,” said the Head musingly, “but I confess that such cases puzzle me. It would be monstrous

of course to blame a boy for his possession of exceptional gifts. South's talents were given him by the Almighty — for some good purpose, no doubt. Poetry and music are great arts, and ought to be held in esteem. It's — it's very puzzling."

Jack's chums condoled with him daily on his being deprived of all musical recreation. He pleaded hard for permission to retain his guitar, but Dr. Higham would not consent. After some correspondence with Dr. South, Jack was allowed one half-hour's violin practice daily. A few weeks later, he was permitted to take his old place in the choir. For these small musical mercies, the boy showed much gratitude.

July brought great heat, and Jack found it harder than ever to keep up a show of work; but a word of encouragement, spoken at the right moment, helped him much. "If it were not so near the end of the term, I should send you up to your old form," his master said. "As, however, the holidays are so close, it is not worth while making any change."

The coming vacation was now Jack's big distraction. A thousand schemes for the spending of it were in his mind, and in all his plans music took a first place. The marriage of voice and lute should begin in the railway train that took him from Beechwood. And for seven jolly weeks there would be no restriction upon either carolling or tootling!

In the cricket pauses of long holiday afternoons, Jack's friends crowded about him, and tried to get

him to make promises of visits during those joyous weeks — now close at hand.

“It’s a beastly shame to divide us,” Willie Phyler declared. “How can you get on without your faithful soprano?”

“And what about your faithful mezzos?” Jimmy White demanded. “Where and how will you make up your quartette without us?”

“Jack doesn’t want a quartette. Didn’t he sing a part-song all by himself at the bazaar?” asked Freddy Fisher, “and isn’t he always a musical host in himself?”

“I say!” exclaimed Willie Phyler suddenly, “we four chaps might have no end of a lark going home. We’ve all got our troubadour dresses and guitars — haven’t we? Well, what’s to hinder our giving open-air performances *en route?*”

Jack leapt into the air for sheer delight. The rest began to caper as if they were suddenly afflicted with St. Vitas’s Dance.

“Why *didn’t* you think of it before!” shouted South, making a rush at Phyler. “You giddy little mule — it’s — it’s a spiffing idea!”

The group of lads might have discovered a new treasure island, so ecstatically excited were they over the suggested escapade. And when it was Jack’s turn to go to the wicket, for perhaps the first time in his life he left the pavilion reluctantly. A few minutes later he was “out for a duck.”

## CHAPTER XV

### MINSTREL BOYS

Gaily the troubadour  
Touched his guitar.

Everything favored the troubadours. Bank holiday this year fell on the 4th of August, and so, although the 4th was the usual date of the breaking-up at Beechwood, the boys were to leave on the 1st.

Of course the original scheme had developed itself considerably; it now included nothing less than a flying visit to Lacton-on-Sea. For it was impossible to travel south-west from Beechwood without passing through Thamesford Junction. Now, once at Thamesford, one had a choice of going north, south, east, or west. A seaside place within easy distance was Lacton, and thither the quartette decided to go.

“I think we shall have money enough,” Jack said, “and once we get on the sands at Lacton, the cash will roll in of its own accord.”

“Bank holiday will bring us a small fortune,” Willie Phyler declared. “Of course *we* shan’t pocket it. We can send it to that old hospital, or put up a stained glass window in the school chapel, or — or something.”

"Fat lot you know about stained-glass windows," Freddy Fisher remarked. "I don't say we shan't make money; fact, I'm pretty sure we shall. But don't let's count our chickens before they're hatched. Besides, there's our keep for three days clear. We mustn't forget that a Sunday comes in."

"Well, but, if we start our performance on Friday night and get a good haul on Saturday, we might perhaps get home for Sunday," suggested Jimmy White, who, if the truth must be told, felt less comfortable about the entire proceeding than did his companions.

"Rot!" exclaimed Jack. "I wouldn't miss bank holiday for anything. Think of the audience of trippers! Think of the crowded sands! Think of the gorgeous fun of the whole thing!"

Jack was radiant. His mother — to whom he had written very regularly and affectionately since that woeful day of the birching and subsequent degradation — was not to return to England until the following spring. His father was going to meet him at Graycote on the 5th, the day after bank holiday. Dr. South had several reasons for coming home, but it was his intention to return to Naples within the week, and to take with him Jack and his sisters.

The four lads, Jack, Freddy, Jimmy and Willie, had made all their arrangements with the greatest secrecy. They had decided to wear crape masks, thus concealing the upper part of their faces. They had looked out the times of the trains to Lacton, selecting

one that started after the departure of all their school-fellows from Thamesford Junction. When the 1st of August arrived, they were singularly fortunate all along the line — both of the railway and their own project.

Jack insisted upon going to one of the best hotels in Lacton. "We are sure to be able to pay," he urged, "and if we have any difficulty, we can always telegraph home — can't we?"

Jimmy White's protests were laughed at. He was the youngest of the four, and his parents were of severe temperament. Of course, Jack was the leader. He was now within a month of fifteen, but if he, and not Jimmy had been the youngest, probably Jack would still have captained the team.

At any other time the hotel people might have looked askance at the arrival of four schoolboys without any person in charge of them; but as their luggage was extensive — they had brought several changes of theatrical costume — and as Jack explained at once that they were only staying for a night or two, they were shown to four separate rooms without demur. Moreover, they were all well dressed and well mannered, and Jack's face was honesty itself.

After exploring Lacton and making their plans for the morrow, they dined at the *table d'hôte*. Four more decorous boys in flawless Eton suits and snowy linen never sat down to dinner; yet they attracted attention, and became the subject of much speculation.

They sat together, but a lady on Jack's left hand drew him out in no time, and long before the meal was finished it was known that the four boys would give an entertainment that evening in the big drawing-room.

“It was very jolly, of course,” said Jack the next morning, “but it brought in no cash. One can't send round the hat in a drawing-room. But to-day's Saturday, and the trippers are already trying to come in. I vote we dress, and start out at once.”

During the morning they received more attention than coppers, more chaff than coin. They had many rivals, for the beach at Lacton was open to all comers, and the quartette of troubadours began to wonder if their refined music would successfully compete with the “nigger” melodies and music-hall songs of the itinerant musicians that thronged the sands. Some of these black-faced gentlemen were evidently hostile and shouted insulting questions after the lads. One of these questions, “Does your mother know y're out?” hurt Jack a good deal. His mother did not know, and he hoped she never would.

Saturday afternoon brought in thousands of excursionists, and business began to be brisk. Jack managed his little troupe with great skill. He soon saw where the more refined sections of the big crowd were wont to congregate, and there he selected his pitch for the afternoon. He had scarcely done so, when two blackguardly-looking men, one with a harp, the other

with a violin, elbowed their way through the crowd and began to dispute his possession. Jack tried to chaff them good-humoredly, but they were angry and abusive, and began to heap filthy imprecations upon the heads of the lads they described as "young toffs what wanted to take the bread out o' honest men's mouths." The crowd took the side of the boys, and the men retired vowing vengeance upon their rivals.

It was a disconcerting beginning, but once Jack had taken the measure of his audience and started the performance, he forgot everything else. He began with a lively little gavotte arranged for four guitars, and then he gave them a popular ditty of the day, sung in his own best style. The applause was great, but when the four lads had joined in a part-song, there was enthusiasm among the crowd, and for some little time Jack and his companions were engaged in collecting the shower of coppers that fell at their feet.

It was a glorious afternoon, and the scene upon the beach was wonderfully bright and animated. The blue sea lapped lazily upon sands of gold; scores of laughing faces made a ring about the singers, and the boys themselves scarcely guessed how graceful and picturesque they looked in their mediæval dress of scarlet silk. There was scarcely any breeze, and after a while the lads realised that in order to be heard and appreciated they had no need to strain their voices.

But it was hard work, and after singing and playing

and dancing for two hours, they were glad to make their way to a restaurant close by, and refresh themselves with tea and cakes.

“Things are going swimmingly!” exclaimed Jack, as he and his chums took possession of a little table, and gave their orders. “These coppers are the worst part of the business.” He had been obliged to tie them up in a pocket handkerchief, for they were much too heavy for the pockets of his silken suit. “Wish we could swop ‘em for silver!” he exclaimed, looking round.

“How many have you got?” asked an odd-looking man at his elbow.

“Don’t know,” answered Jack untying the handkerchief.

“There’s five bobs’ worth there,” said the man. “I can take that much if you want to get rid of ‘em.”

“Thanks, awfully!” exclaimed Jack, beginning to count the coppers. “There’s threepence-halfpenny short of five shillings,” he added when he had piled the money in five little heaps.

“That’s all right,” said the man, laying down a five shilling piece. “I heard you sing just now, and I’d no change. I always like plenty of coppers about me at holiday time. Saves silver, you know.” The man winked, rather unpleasantly Jack thought; “but,” he said to the others as the fellow withdrew, “it’s jolly to be rid of those beastly pennies.”

But when, four hours later, the weary, copper-laden

lads were preparing to leave the sands and return to their hotel that night, they were surprised to find the money-changer of the afternoon again at their elbow, fully prepared to give them shining silver pieces for their evening shower of pennies — amounting now to more than ten shillings!

## CHAPTER XVI

### AN UNEXPECTED INTERLUDE

“The seeds of our own punishment are sown  
At the same time we commit sin.”

— *Heriod.*

Sunday morning saw the four young minstrels lying late in bed. They were astonished to find themselves so tired. They managed, however, to attend the 11 o'clock service close by, spending the remainder of the day rather lazily. All but Jack seemed a trifle dispirited; and even he drooped a little towards the late afternoon. They revived, however, after dinner, and before going to bed made elaborate plans for the morrow.

The August Bank Holiday opened gloomily enough. Rain fell heavily in the early morning, and the boys felt glad that they had decided to appear that day in *pierrot* costume, and not in the more costly scarlet silk.

If the crowd had been great on Saturday, to-day it was overwhelming. It increased still more towards noon, when the weather began to clear. The afternoon was perfect. The lads did not return to their hotel for luncheon, but made a hearty meal at the restaurant they had visited on Saturday.

"I couldn't stand this for many days together," Jack said to the rest in an interval between two performances. "Jingo! but it does take it out of a fellow! I'd give this load of coppers for a dip in the sea!"

"So would I," said Willie Phyler, "but I suppose it's out of the question."

"Quite," decided Jack. "The beggars are waiting for us to begin again — bother 'em!"

"See that fellow in the brown billy-cock, just on the outside edge?" whispered Freddy Fisher. "Yes, the clean-shaven chap. Well, he's been at every blessed performance we've given to-day."

"Shows his appreciation of a good thing," laughed Jack. "Hope he's stumped up. Well, what are we to give 'em next?"

"I vote for that pantomime bit," said Jimmy White. "It'll give our throats a rest."

"Right!" exclaimed Jack. "Just the thing! Sharp's the word."

Jack had just explained to the crowd the nature of the coming piece, when there was a sudden movement among the people; and two men appearing from opposite points of the big circle of sight-seers, stepped into the actor's arena. For a moment the onlookers thought it was all part of the coming performance, but when one of the men — clean-shaven, and wearing a brown billy-cock hat laid a hand on Jack's shoulder, and another on Willie Phyler's, there was

a moment's hush, and the inner ring of spectators distinctly heard the detective's words: "I arrest you on the charge of passing bad money!" The second detective had already seized Freddy and Jimmy.

The lads were dumfounded and looked at their captors in dismay. Jack made an effort to free himself, hotly-demanding to know the reason of his arrest. The detective repeated what he had said before, but Jack scarcely heard a word. The crowd was pressing in upon the boys and detectives, and cries arose on all sides. It soon became evident to the prisoners that they had many friends and that some of their late auditors were only too anxious to effect a rescue. Unfortunately, everybody was shouting and nobody was listening. Pushing the lads before them, the officers tried now to force their way through the crowd, but they could make no headway through the phalanx of angry men in front of them; and Jack, taking advantage of a big lurch on the part of the mob, managed to free himself, leaving however, a portion of the sleeve of his pierrot costume in the detective's hand. Having his right hand free, the man now took a whistle from his pocket, and blew on it a long blast. At the height of the confusion three policemen came running up, parting the crowd in the very line of Jack's attempted flight. "Hold the lad fast, one of you!" the detective called out; "the other two come here!"

A great roar of indignation arose from the crowd,

and a sudden rush upon the second detective was made by some of the young men in the rear — its immediate effect being to free both Freddy Fisher and Jimmy White. The first officer now took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, and snapped one on Willie's right wrist, saying "We'll make sure of you at any rate." Then the man blew a second blast on his whistle.

The crowd had greatly increased in density, and a free fight seemed to be going on in every direction, while the crush and the noise and the heat grew unbearable.

More policemen came running up, and in a few minutes they had made a passage through the crowd and a circle round the detective and his one prisoner. Jack was in the grasp of a burly officer; in a short time Freddy and Jimmy were both seized, and the unhappy quartette was complete. Two more pairs of handcuffs were produced, and Jack soon found himself fastened to Willie Phyler by one hand and to Freddy Fisher by the other, Jimmy White being manacled to Willie's left wrist. This being done, three or four policemen made a lane through the mob, and the fettered boys were hustled away from the sands by the two detectives.

They had left a crowd on the beach only to be followed by another and a less sympathetic rabble in the streets. Sick with fear, and feeling their degradation as only four such boys could feel it, they were

now chaffed by a gang of street lads and idlers and pushed along the crowded thoroughfare amid cries of, "They've got 'em on!" "They've got 'em all on!" "'Ow does yer bracelets fit?" etc., etc.

It was almost a relief to the unhappy lads to find themselves at last in the cells of the police station. Again and again on the dismal journey thither, Jack had implored the detectives to call a cab. When they refused, the frantic boy tugged at his handcuffs so violently that his wrists bled freely, and it was only when he found that he was hurting the lads he was fastened to that he desisted.

Perhaps throughout England, four more miserable youngsters did not lie down that night, and try to sleep — thinking bitterly of the morrow.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ANOTHER NEWSPAPER REPORT

“I know not how to tell thee!  
Shame rises in my face, and interrupts  
The story of my tongue!”

— *Otway.*

Dr. South having arrived at Graycote on the Tuesday after Bank Holiday in order to meet Jack, was astonished not to find his boy at home. “I shall get there before lunch-time on Tuesday morning,” the lad had written, intimating that with his father’s leave he would spend Saturday, Sunday and Monday with his friend Willie Phyler — as indeed he did.

It chanced that the Doctor had read his Tuesday paper rather superficially that morning. The long accounts of holiday proceedings had not interested him overmuch, and the thought of meeting his son was uppermost in his mind. But after his solitary luncheon he casually took up the paper again. It was not long before he came upon the following:

### EXTRAORDINARY PROCEEDINGS AT LACTON-ON-THE-SEA.

“This popular sea-side resort was, yesterday, the scene of a remarkable incident which at one time threatened to lead to a most serious *fracas* between the police and the huge crowd that thronged the sands. For some time local detectives have

been on the track of a gang of coiners, and yesterday they arrested four lads who, it transpired, had been in the town since Friday last, posing on the sands and elsewhere as singers and actors, and who are now believed to be in the employ of the above mentioned gang. The two detectives who attempted the arrest found themselves quite unable to convey their prisoners to the police office, the sympathies of the mob being greatly excited in favor of the youngsters, whose acting and singing appear to have been much above the average. Eventually, with the aid of a small body of police, the lads were handcuffed together and taken to the station. They will be brought up to-morrow morning at the Town Hall on a charge of circulating bad money, and also of getting board and lodging by false pretences from the landlord of the Royal Hotel. Several arrests were subsequently made of persons who attempted to rescue the prisoners from the hands of the detectives. The boys, who were clad in pierrot costume, are of gentlemanly manners and address, and the oldest of them cannot be more than fifteen, while the youngest is barely thirteen."

When Dr. South had finished the paragraph he rose hastily and threw the paper on the floor. The next moment however he indignantly rejected the suspicion that had entered his mind. "Jack may be erratic, but he is not vicious," the father murmured to himself as he paced up and down his study. "The lad may be lazy, but he is not base. I will not believe that my boy —"

The housemaid entered the room with a telegram.

"To Dr. South,  
"Graycote Grange,  
"Graycote,  
"Kinchester.

"Have you a son named John Edward Philip, and has he just left Beechwood School?

"From Chief Constable,

"LACTON-ON-THE-SEA."

Dr. South had to steady his right hand with his left while he wrote the answer to the telegram.

Half-an-hour later he was on his way to Lacton.

When Dr. South left the train at Lacton Station, a local evening paper was being sold on the platform, and the nearly broken-hearted father bought and opened one in all haste. He soon found what he was looking for.

The day after Bank Holiday had been a busy one at the Police Court, and the case of the boy-minstrels was taken last.

“Prisoners were remanded till Friday,” were the words Dr. South’s eyes fastened upon, and then—“Several gentlemen whose names did not transpire, but who are believed to be visitors staying at the Royal Hotel, offered bail for the prisoners. The magistrates regretted that they could not accept bail in such a case, and the prisoners, who seemed to feel their position very acutely, were removed to the cells.”

Happily, however, there was a sequel to this last paragraph:

“Before the Court rose, Mr. Benson, solicitor for the defence, made a second application for bail, urging that he had now a complete answer to the charges brought against his clients. The application was opposed by the police, but after some hesitation the Mayor said they had decided to grant it if satisfactory sureties were forthcoming. Late that afternoon the accused were liberated and drove in a closed cab from the police-station to the Royal Hotel.”

Dr. South himself lost no time in driving to the Royal Hotel.

The landlord of the Royal Hotel gained much by the misfortune of the boys who had come to him as guests. By Wednesday afternoon the nearest relations of all the lads had mustered in great force, and the hotel was crowded. It is needless to say that the landlord had already withdrawn the charge of fraud that the Monday's arrest had led him to make.

Which person concerned in the coming appearance at Friday's Police Court was the most miserable it would be hard to say; but it is certain that the boys themselves suffered intensely. Their elders, who were in constant conference with the best solicitors in Lacton, were assured that there was absolutely no case at all, and that the police had made a stupendous blunder.

Great as Dr. South's own trouble was, he spent much time in trying to console Willie Phyler's mother — the widow of a clergyman, and a lady of great refinement and sensibility — who could not have shown greater distress if her boy had been charged with wilful murder.

Seeing how greatly his son was suffering, Dr. South uttered not one word of reproach, and all that Jack could do when they were alone together was to fling himself into his father's arms and sob so piteously that the Doctor felt forced to console rather than reprove.

It was only at nightfall that the lads ventured to go out, and the days that intervened before their re-

appearance at the Police Court seemed like long months of agony.

When Friday morning came, four cabs were drawn up before the Royal Hotel, and into one of these Jack followed his father. The lad felt very sick. In a few minutes he would again be a prisoner in the dock. Under what circumstances would his next ride be taken? Only last Friday morning he and his companions had watched a gang of prisoners alight from a prison van at Thamesford Junction — three men and a boy of about his own age, in convict dress, each attached by the right wrist to a long chain. Would he and his chums find themselves that very day in a similar position? The length of his sentence scarcely troubled him. The one thought that made his heart throb wildly was the possibility of his being sent to prison, and the overwhelming trouble and lasting disgrace this would bring upon those who loved him — to say nothing of the ruin he had brought upon his three companions and their respective families.

Four trembling white-faced boys stood in the dock and pleaded "not guilty." The magistrate eyed them with surprise — Dr. South thought with sympathy. For the quartette now presented a very different appearance to that of the strolling players of Tuesday morning — clad then in pierrot costume and with paint and powder only half-washed from their faces,

To-day they were four young English gentlemen in Eton suits, looking unhappy, it is true, because they had been naughty. But that they had been guilty of felony seemed absurd.

They were not kept long in suspense. At the very beginning of the case the Chief Constable made a statement that rendered unnecessary the hearing of anything save the formal evidence. The police had been misled, he told the Court, by the terms of information supplied to them from a distance. Itinerant musicians had been mentioned in the telegram, and as he had proofs that the accused had paid for various articles of food with counterfeit coin, he submitted that his men were justified in making the arrest. But that very morning the real culprits had been brought to Lacton in custody and would be charged forthwith.

The Mayor said that he offered his congratulations both to the boys and to their friends. No suspicion of any kind attached itself to the lads, but he could not help thinking that they had given their relatives much pain by masquerading in public — he felt sure without the knowledge or consent of their parents. For this they had been severely punished, and he hoped that the events of the week would be a warning to them for the rest of their lives.

Jack and his friends left the dock with burning cheeks. They could not yet leave the Court, since they were required to act as witnesses in the next case. Three of the four men who were now brought in, Jack

recognised at once. One was the fellow who had given him bad five-shilling pieces for the coppers; the other two were the harp and violin players the lads had encountered on Saturday. The prisoners were committed for trial at the assizes.

The same afternoon Dr. South and Jack left Lacton for Graycote, and the other young minstrels and their friends started for their respective homes.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A FATHER'S SENTENCE

“There are a thousand joyous things in life,  
Which pass unheeded in a life of joy  
As thine hath been, till breezy sorrow comes  
To ruffle it; and daily duties paid  
Hardly at first, at length will bring repose  
To the sad mind that studies to perform them.”

— *Talfourd.*

A fortnight later, the quartette of minstrels — only one of whom belongs to our Country Quartette (a complete account of Jack's school-chums belongs to another history) — met again at the County town where the assizes were held. They were more than thankful for the shortness of the interval, for though they had nothing to fear for themselves from judge or jury, they exceedingly disliked the publicity of the affair and were all anxious that their Lacton freak should not come out in too great detail. They looked at one another a little sheepishly when they met in one of the waiting rooms of the Assize Court, and though they tried to laugh and chat, the attempt was not an all-round success.

It was in fact a rather sad meeting. Subsequently they gave their evidence very intelligently and straightforwardly, and had the satisfaction of seeing the real

culprits sentenced to penal servitude; but they certainly did not enjoy the cross-examination to which they were subjected by counsel for the defence who, naturally, made the most of the Lacton escapade.

Jack had spent a depressing fortnight at Graycote. He was glad that the Graycotes themselves had gone to Scotland, and he was more than thankful to hear from Johnny Gidlow that Davison was spending his holidays, or at least the greater part of them, away from home.

Dr. South went away nearly every morning and only returned for the evening dinner — not always for that. To Jack he seemed very anxious and worried about a number of things, but though his manner was kind, he said very little to his son, and if it had not been for Johnny Gidlow, that fortnight at home would have been drearier than it actually was.

Johnny of Hearts, who had quite lately lost his father, was full of sympathy for his benefactor's son. Like all the Graycote people, he knew all about the Lacton affair, like them also he was indignant at the treatment to which Jack and his friends had been subjected, and in his shy way the younger boy tried hard to make the other understand that everybody felt for him very much and that he had not lost an atom of the respect and esteem of the village folk.

Jack was grateful for Johnny's sympathy, and after a time it began to be a real comfort to him. Since

his father's death Gidlow had had the run of the Grange and was always at hand if South wished for his company. Very soon the two became inseparable, and Jack began to feel a great respect for the laborer's son, while the latter worshipped the older, better-born and more gifted lad with a worship that was half reverence and half gratitude.

"But, I say, Hearts, you mustn't go on saying 'sir' to me, you know," Jack had to insist. "To my father — yes, but not to me."

"Well, Master South —" Gidlow would begin.

"Now that's worse still. If anything could rile me more than 'sir' it would be that horrid 'master.' No, call me Diamonds, or Jack, or anything you like."

So during that rather mournful fortnight the lads played a good deal of tennis, strolled down to the river for fishing or boating and practiced bowling with great regularity. Jack's cricket had deteriorated alarmingly since last year, and he found his companion more than a match for him both in batting and bowling.

"Diamonds are bright, and so are you," John Graycote had said to his old chum a year ago when the four Jacks had taken the names of cards; but 'Hearts' could not but notice the great change that had taken place in 'Diamonds.' There was only one point in which the latter was at all like his old self, and that was in his invariable kindness to his humble friend. Johnny quite understood why the other never sang or

touched any instrument of music; but he marvelled greatly at the absence of that spirit of fun, that winning vivacity for which Jack had been so famous.

Jack wondered that his father should be away so constantly. "I suppose," the boy said to himself more than once, "he finds it too painful to be alone with me. I wonder if he'll *ever* forgive me, and whether we shall ever again be to one another what we were before?"

But the night after Jack returned from the Assizes, as he and his father were sitting together on the lawn, the boy quite suddenly seized the other's hand and pressed it between his own hot palms, at the same time raising an appealing face to his father's.

"What it is, Jack?"

The lad tried to speak, but all he could do was to clasp his father's hand a little harder and choke.

"I can't feel — *quite* sure that — that you've forgiven me, father," he sobbed out after a time, and with great difficulty.

"Have no fear on that point, my boy," said the Doctor. "You are forgiven — fully. But there is a further point, Jack — is there not?"

"You mean my penance, father?"

"You've had punishment enough — of one kind, my poor lad. But I am anxious for your future. I want to give you an opportunity of reforming yourself. I had intended to take you back to Italy with me: I cannot do that now, for many reasons. Nor

can I leave you here for the remainder of the holidays. You will not return to Beechwood of course, and — well, there are circumstances that make it impossible for me to choose another school for you at present. I have thought about the matter a great deal, Jack, and have talked it over with men of sense and experience. Shall I tell you what conclusion we have come to?"

"Do, please, father!" the boy explained with an anxious look.

"Well, we think you need an entire change of life — for a time, at least. You need a simpler, and at the same time a rougher and a harder life. You have been breathing an unwholesome atmosphere, Jack — that of gross flattery, adulation and self-indulgence. You need bracing and stimulating, physically and morally. I would put you under the care of a private tutor if I could find the right sort of man, but, for the present, I cannot. To-day I have visited a sort of high-class reformatory —"

"Oh, father!" the boy cried out.

"Don't be alarmed, Jack. I am not going to send you there. I soon found that it was not an institution that suited your case. It is for criminal boys of good family and for those who have shown criminal tendencies. Thank God, my lad, naughty as you have been you are not a criminal."

Jack shivered, and his father led the way indoors.

"No, I am going to put you to hard labor, Jack

— for a time — on a farm of mine a long way from here. My tenant, Mr. Wilson, is a man I have the utmost confidence in. I have known him intimately for many years, long before you were born, my boy — in fact since I myself was your age. We were born in the same village and played together as youngsters. The farm has been in our family for over a hundred years, and is of considerable size. Mr. Wilson has consented to take you on as cow-boy, and you are to be lodged as such. He will treat you, remember, just as if you were a lad working for wages; except that I give him leave to punish you in any way he thinks fit if you are idle or disobedient. You need not be afraid that he will be cruel. As I have said, I know the man thoroughly. He is a widower, and all his sons and daughters are married and settled. You will be simply one of many laborers, and when your day's work is done you will be left to yourself a good deal; but —" Dr. South hesitated. What he thought was "you will be too tired to get into mischief." But, besides this, he had as a matter of fact made very special arrangements with Farmer Wilson as to the supervision of Jack after hours.

"I had thought of forbidding you all music, Jack, but I have changed my mind about that. You may have your guitar, and I will send you regularly the papers and magazines you got at school. Take one or two books also, but let me know what they are.

And — well, I think that is all I have to say — except —”

Jack was looking out upon the lawn with eyes that did not see.

The Doctor followed him to the window and took his hand. Suddenly the boy turned and flung his arms about his father's neck. Then a certain hardness that seemed to have crept into the Doctor's voice vanished as he said: “Does it all seem very harsh, my boy?”

Jack could not answer.

“If it does, dear lad, do try to think that I am doing it — not merely for your good, but, because — because, my darling boy, I love you so much!”

And though Jack felt that the penance would be a heavy one, he was comforted because he knew that he was forgiven.

## CHAPTER XIX

### SERVITUDE

“There services are clock-like to be set  
Backward and forward, at their lord’s command.”

—*Ben Jonson.*

“Imprisonment with hard labor!”

This was the burden of Jack’s song every step of the three hours’ journey. And it did not change when he reached Mr. Wilson’s farm at Clemington.

Mr. Wilson himself was a hard-looking and very taciturn man.

“You are Dr. South’s lad — are you?” was his greeting when Jack met him in the farm-yard. He did not even shake hands. “I’ll show you where you’ve got to sleep,” he said, making a gesture that seemed to mean, “come this way.” Yet the farmer was going away from the house and in the direction of one of the barns. Jack followed.

“The youngest cow-lad always sleeps here,” said Mr. Wilson, when Jack had mounted a ladder and found himself in a loft that was really over one of the adjoining cow-sheds, though approached from the barn. “You’re luggage has come. Better get into your working clothes now. We’re pretty busy to-day.”

Jack looked aghast, but said nothing. This indeed was penal servitude!

He thought of the day and night he had spent in a cell at the police station; even that was scarcely less inviting than this hay-loft.

But the farmer had already vanished, and Jack must needs obey orders. The big portmanteau he found lying in the farm-house kitchen was very heavy, but he managed to drag it across the yard and up the step-ladder. It contained the special outfit his father had ordered and sent on in advance.

His new clothes of corduroy and fustian were stiff as boards, and he thought the hob-nailed, iron-plated boots must be the very heaviest any mortal boy had ever worn. When he had laced them on, it seemed to him that they were only substitutes for ankle-irons. He tried to laugh as he listened to his own foot-fall on the boards; but as he looked round the cheerless, unfurnished loft and glanced at the low, hard-looking little bed, it was with difficulty he stifled a sob.

“It’s my own fault,” he said to himself a few minutes later as, under the direction of a grinning rustic, he began to clean out one of the cow-sheds, “my own fault altogether. I must try to bear it.”

All that burning August day he worked manfully and well. He found his companions more trying than the labor — hard as it was. There were two or three lads of his own age, and these jeered at him when he blundered. The older hands were more re-

spectful, and several of them touched their hats when they met him — to his great confusion. One old man showed him how to hold his besom; another how to manipulate a muck-fork. Farmer Wilson was taciturnity itself.

Meals were trying times. Some five or six hands dined with Mr. Wilson, Jack and three dairymaids, in the kitchen. The food was coarse and solid, but plentiful. Conversation was local and personal — not to say heavy. Happily it was not worse: Farmer Wilson's presence was a sufficient check.

At twenty minutes past eight, after a supper of bread and cheese and table beer, Jack climbed heavily and wearily to his sleeping place. He did not try to check his grief now. It had taken the form of a great loneliness — the hardest thing to bear when one is young. No one who cared for him, no one who loved him was at hand!

“*No one?*” It was as though the question had been whispered in his ear. When his storm of sorrow was spent he tried to pray. He had thrown himself on his bed to weep: now he rose and knelt beside it.

But even as he knelt he almost fell asleep. Rising, he tried to unlace his boots, but the thick leather laces were in a knot. Throwing himself again upon the bed he fell asleep in his clothes.

Jack awoke to the sound of sharp knocking below. Somebody was rapping the barn-door with a stick.

Feeling stiff and cold and unrefreshed, the boy glanced at his watch. It was four o'clock.

"Look alive there!" It was the farmer's morning greeting.

"I'm dressed, at any rate," Jack said to himself. "But where's the water?"

Neither basin nor jug was there, but "Wash, I will," he said aloud as he left the loft.

"Pump's over yonder," said the farmer who had overhead him.

"Mayn't I have a tub, Sir?" Jack's tone was pleading and conciliatory and the farmer hesitated.

"You'll have time for a dip in the river if you're handy," he said. "You know what you've got to do?"

Jack remembered that his first duty was to drive the cows from the meadows and then to help in the milking.

It was a brilliant morning, but running water is apt to be chilly at four a. m. Jack, however, enjoyed the "cool silver shock of a plunge" in the river and felt braced and refreshed.

But long before breakfast was ready he felt faint and dizzy. His bungling over the milking provoked shouts of laughter, and one of the farm lads leeringly asked him if he'd ever seen a cow before.

Penal servitude! Would this weary round of penance-labor ever cease? Would it always go on from four in the morning till breakfast at half-past six —

from breakfast till noon — from noon till sunset! Would the only intervals be always filled up with meals of coarse food eaten in the company of unwashed and unsavory farm-hands!

• • • • •

Saturday came without any change and with only the rest and refreshment of one poor hour of solitude after supper. But the hour had become a golden one. Jack spent it in song. To his great joy, violin as well as guitar had been sent after him.

The nearness of Sunday made him happier than he had felt all week. Of course there would be work on the morrow — cows to be fetched, milking to be done, horses to be fed; but there would be more leisure and more rest. And there would be church. He was wondering how he should dress. Might he venture to wear the tweed suit he had travelled in? It did not matter much, of course. Nobody knew him, and he knew nobody. He was Mr. Wilson's new farm-lad; perhaps he ought to dress as such. Going to his portmanteau he turned over its contents. What was this coat of black frieze? No doubt, for Sunday wear. A second pair of boots, too? They were nearly as heavy as the brogues he was wearing, but the hob-nails were not quite so big. Here, then, was his Sunday outfit. He could laugh a little over it now. It would be something to wear one of those big broad, schoolboy collars once again.

Jack had made for himself a sort of divan close to

the window of the loft, and the hay upon which he half reclined was soft and sweet-smelling. From his open window he could see across the well-kept farm-yard into the meadows. The view was to the north-west, and the after-glow of a gorgeous sunset held the boy's eyes as he toyed with his guitar and now and then broke into song. He never guessed that he had an audience; but three distinct groups of people were listening eagerly for every note of lute and voice. If only he had known, he might have given them something worth the hearing. It was better that he did not know. He was singing for his own solace.

But as the after-glow began to grow dimmer and the evening air cooler; as "the print of the first white star" appeared in the darkening blue and a great hush at length held the whole country-side, Jack's music rang from the hay-loft with greater distinctness, and the listening groups pressed closer beneath the shadow of the barn. For now the boy was tearing from the strings of his guitar all the music of which it was capable — loud, lightsome and strong, but very sweet. Then rose his own ringing contralto voice, and the listeners quivered under the rush and shock of his song of the sea, every syllable of which was clear, distinct and melodious —

"I will go back to the great sweet mother —  
Mother and lover of men, the Sea.  
I will go down to her, I, and none other,  
Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me.  
Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast;

O fair white mother in days long past,—  
 Born without sister, born without brother,—  
 Let free my soul as thy soul is free."

His instrumental interludes were long — for the boy was thinking of Lacton and struggling with a choking sensation not quite under his control; but he managed to complete four stanzas of the poem. The listeners never knew that hot tears were falling upon the tinkling instrument.

But when, after an interval of a few seconds, the guitar again was heard, they were sensible of a change in the spirit of the music. There was now no rush and tumble of lilting lines, but, instead, a pathetic melody in the minor. Then the voice arose again and chanted wailingly the song of — Sorrow.

"When I was young I said to Sorrow,  
 'Come, and I will play with thee':—  
 He is near me now all day,  
 And at night returns to say:  
 'I will call again to-morrow,  
 I will come and stay with thee.'

Through the woods we walk together,  
 His soft footsteps rustle nigh me;  
 To shield an unregarded head  
 He hath built a winter shed;  
 And all night long in rainy weather,  
 I hear his gentle breathings by me."

No word heard by mortal listener came again from the loft that night. Jack laid down the guitar and knelt by his bedside.

In a few square inches of broken mirror that served him for a looking-glass, Jack was criticising himself. Church bells were ringing for an eleven o'clock service.

"I think I look the part," he said to himself with a smile. "Only I mustn't show so much linen," he continued, putting the big turn-down collar inside his coat. "That's better. No fear of my being taken for anything but a plough-boy. The boots would betray me—if nothing else."

He was absurdly mistaken. A stranger glancing at him casually would have thought him the son of a country gentleman: looked at and examined critically, he could not have been set down as a peasant. Clothes are something, of course; but Jack's upright figure and well-lifted head, to say nothing of his refined air and noticeable features, declared the well-bred boy—hob-nails or no hob-nails. Of course people stared. Was he not a stranger? Luckily for himself, he was so firmly convinced that he looked the character he had assumed that he did not blush under the scrutiny to which both rich and poor subjected him.

The service soothed him greatly. Joining in the psalms and hymns, he sang pianissimo, for in his immediate neighborhood very few were taking an active part, and he would not needlessly draw attention to himself. He had tried hard to escape the verger and take his place in a free pew in the aisle, but that

functionary led him up the nave and motioned him into an upper seat. Jack guessed that the church was not very "High," for there were no flowers or lights on the Communion table. He was sorry for this. If the Vicar had been "Catholic" (as Dr. South put it) the boy would have gone to Confession. It would have been such a comfort to him just now. He could not go before leaving Graycote, for Mr. Burton did not approve of the practice, and "Father" Hunton was away from home. What an awkward business it was, he thought, this having to seek for a "Catholic" Priest in a church that was (so he had been taught) a branch of the One Holy Catholic Church. No wonder his father was beginning to be upset by these things!

Jack remained on his knees when the service was over—really trying to pray, but conscious that he was also trying to escape the "after Church" ordeal and to give the congregation a good start homeward. He knew that all eyes were upon him. Mothers and fathers would look at him kindly enough, no doubt; but it was holiday time, and he had noticed several families of tall-hatted, Eton-jacketed boys. Like most lads he dreaded the criticism of his own kind. *They* would spot his boots in no time, and the snobbish among them would write him down a cad.

Rising at length he came out of Church, looking neither to right nor left. Groups were standing about the churchyard gate, but Jack saw no one. Once in

the lane, he soon disappeared in the meadows that led to Mr. Wilson's farm.

He was greatly afraid the late afternoon milking would interfere with evening service, a comfort he did not want to miss. Since his nursery days, he had never experienced a serviceless Sunday night. To his great joy, he found that he had plenty of time.

Jack, like all boys of his temperament, was peculiarly susceptible to the influences of Sunday evening prayer and preaching. To-night everything seemed to touch him deeply. Of course there was any amount of sentiment mixed up in the glow of feeling that seemed to bring him nearer to God; yet there was more than sentiment, for he prayed earnestly and long.

That night as he sat at the open window of his loft, he sang all the hymns he had heard that day — and many more. And the groups below listened reverently.

## CHAPTER XX

### CORN HARVEST

Only in August I have not seen you.  
August comes with his wheat and poppies;  
Ruddy and sunlight in corn and coppice:  
Only in August I have not seen you.

Jack's correspondence troubled him, and that in two ways. First of all, the act of writing was in itself a difficulty. There was nothing in the hayloft where he spent his evenings that in the least degree resembled a table, and he had to sit on his portmanteau and rest a blotting pad on his knees. This, however, was a minor difficulty.

What to say to his mother and sisters, to John Graycote and others, was the real worry. Mrs. South had greatly improved in health, but the Doctor — now returned to Italy — had not ventured to tell her of Jack's spree and its unhappy sequel. She knew that her son was at Wilson's farm, and her husband had admitted that Jack was doing some hard work; but she had no idea of the actual position of things.

“His coming here would have been bad for him,” Doctor South had urged. “Farm life is just the thing for him at this time. He is not in bad health, but he had neglected — his games among other things, and

his muscles are flabby. In a hot climate like this he would be enervated still more."

Not to have her boy with her was a huge disappointment to the mother, but as she had every confidence in her husband's judgment, and as he assured her that what he had done was the best possible thing for Jack's welfare, she soon ceased to grieve.

But, at first, Jack found it hard to answer all his mother's questions. She now wrote to him twice, sometimes thrice, a week, and though she frequently begged him not to reply oftener than once in seven days, Jack's love led him to make an effort to write at least a postcard every time he heard from her. Every Sunday he wrote her a letter.

After a week or two, however, he found writing to his mother not only easier, but an immense comfort. John Graycote's letters remained the difficulty.

It was evident that "Clubs" was suspicious, and Jack only hesitated to give him a complete history of the events of the past month out of consideration for his feelings.

Graycote had reason to be anxious, if not suspicious, for a highly-colored hearsay report of the business had reached Darnley Castle. Lord Edward Pankin was staying there and assured the Graycotes that a friend of his had heard that young South had been sent to penal servitude for five years. A telegram to Jack himself at Graycote soon disproved this story, but in his subsequent letters to John of Clubs, Dia-

monds wrote so guardedly that his chum forbore to ask for details and came to the conclusion that Jack was, or had been, in serious trouble.

"I *can't* understand what you're doing at this farm," wrote Graycote. "You never told me that this Mr. Wilson was a friend of yours. I never guessed *you* had a taste for agriculture. You say you're 'pottering about and helping a bit.' I can't understand it at all. We're returning to Graycote next week, and I shall come and look you up. There's nothing like a chat for getting at the rights of things."

Jack was breakfasting as he read his letter, but when he came to this part he dropped his spoon into the big bowl of bread and milk and groaned. The next moment, however, he was trying not to laugh aloud. "John's quite right," he thought to himself. "There is nothing like a chat for setting things right. Let him come by all means. It's the very thing. But will Mr. Wilson let me see him?"

The farmer's silence was like a nightmare to Jack, yet the latter was already beginning to like his father's tenant. Feeling greatly the need of a bath after his day's work, and having scarcely energy enough to go down to the river at night, the boy had begged his master to provide him with a tub, adding: "I know my father would like me to have it, Sir, and I've got my sponge and bath towels."

The farmer's solemn face relaxed into a smile.

"You're a rare chap for cold water," he said kindly. "I wish all my lads were as fond of it. Come with me a minute, and I'll show you something you haven't seen."

Jack followed Mr. Wilson into the house and saw many things that he had not seen before. It was the first time that he had gone beyond the kitchen; he saw now that the house was big and well furnished.

"There's a bath-room here," the farmer said, taking Jack up a wide staircase and opening a door on the first landing. "You can use this as often as you like — when your work's done."

Jack was demonstrative in his gratitude, but Mr. Wilson only smiled and stumped downstairs in silence. But that night after the boy had written a merry post-card to his mother he sang all the happiest songs he could remember. He did not know that the farmer stood listening for nearly an hour.

There were indeed many things Jack did not know. He never guessed, for instance, that Mr. Wilson was in regular correspondence with his (Jack's) father; nor had he any idea of the written orders and regulations concerning his treatment that same father had left in the farmer's hands. And certainly the lad did not know how closely he was watched by his employer. Indeed, one of the things Jack was inclined to resent in the beginning was that Wilson appeared to take no notice whatever of his new hand.

"I wonder how long my father means to keep me

here?" was a question Jack could get no answer to. "All will depend upon circumstances," Dr. South had said when he bade his son "good-bye." "To the end of the holidays, certainly: in all probability much longer," he had written in a recent note. "Mr. Wilson reports well of you, and what he says makes me very happy. When one month is up, I shouldn't be surprised if he has improved your condition in some small way."

Jack was going on well with his fellow-laborers. The lads no longer jeered at him for his mistakes, and indeed he had mastered the details of his daily duties very fairly. He could milk with the best of them, and the cleaning out of big cow-sheds no longer nauseated him. He was still very weary when "knock-off time" came, and there were nights when "he needed all his breath for climbing and the singing died away."

Harvest time came with September, and the labor increased. It was a year of great heat, and the corn-fields were like furnaces of red gold. Jack was beginning to learn how to work — not slowly but measuredly. In the beginning he had, to use the expression of Tom Barclay, "gone at things a bit too mad-headed, like." Even Mr. Wilson had said more than once: "There's no such hurry, lad; take your time."

It was the length of these hot days Jack found so tiring. Up at four always, he could never finish till seven in the evening, and by nine he was so weary that

if he did not get into bed he fell asleep sitting in the hay-loft window.

In spite of everything, however, there was something in the life that he began to enjoy. The late summer was wonderfully beautiful, he thought, and he had never known before what a lovely thing the dawn really is. It is true that he was only half awake when he got out of his bed and that he came down the step-ladder and walked across the yard like one struggling against the fumes of opium; but the fresh morning air blowing across dewy meadows soon revived him, and after his invariable dip in the river he felt "no muscle had stopped in its playing," that no sinew was unbraced, and would sing at the top of his voice as he drove the cows from the fields —

"How good is man's life here, mere living!"

Even at nightfall his limbs did not ache as they had done during the first three weeks, nor did the stupor of weariness oppress him so heavily. And night never really seemed to fall, for the after-glow remained until the coming of the stars and until the Angel of Sleep laid his healing hand upon the laboring lad and carried him to the fair far homeland of slumber.

Old Tom Barclay — he was not bailiff, for Mr. Wilson himself looked after things, but Tom was a bit of a gaffer — was very helpful to Jack and very kind. Whether instructed by his master, or not, the boy never knew; but there were many things Tom

would not let him attempt — things that might have taxed his strength unduly. Also there were many little practical difficulties that puzzled Jack from time to time, and for a solution of these he would always turn to the old man. Tom would look at him sometimes with an expression in which there was an odd mixture of amazement, amusement and pity.

Thus one day there was a heavy thunderstorm followed by a long pouring downfall of rain. Jack was in the far meadows when it began, and long before he could reach the farm, he was soaked to the skin. He was wearing the ordinary laboring costume of shirt and trousers, and when Tom met him, he insisted upon an immediate change. But the next morning when Jack tried to put his boots on, he found, to his dismay, that he could not get his feet into them. Sodden with rain, they had dried during the night, and the thick leather was hard as cast-iron. Running to Tom for advice, the old man looked at him wonderingly for a moment and then laughed heartily.

“Eh, lad,” he said, “it’s easy to tell as you’ve al’ys been waited on hand and foot. Specially t’foot. They wants greasin’, Mester Jack, that’s what they wants. Bring ‘em to t’ saddle-house and let me show ye how to do ‘t.”

This introduction to dubbin solved another of Jack’s difficulties, and saved him time and labor, for he had been wont to expend much blacking daily in making his ‘clinkers,’ as Tom called them, presentable, and with rather poor results.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A VISITOR

“ Nobly he yokes  
A smiling with a sigh: as if the sigh  
Was that it was, for not being such a smile;  
The smile mocking the sigh. . . .”

— *Cymbeline*.

The Hon. John Graycote stood knocking at the front door of Mr. Wilson's house. He had lifted the big iron knocker three times, but no one had as yet appeared, for the maids were all in the dairy, and the men were in the fields, gathering in the last remnants of the corn harvest.

“ It would be absurd to go away after coming all this distance,” John of Clubs said to himself; “ I suppose I'd better prowl about a little. Sure to come across somebody.”

He was very short-sighted, as we know, but both sound and scent assured him that he was not very far from the farm-yard. Peering through his spectacles, he saw a door in the wall that enclosed the neglected garden and lawn that lay in front of the house — a door that might, or might not, lead to the farm-yard. As he neared the wall, he heard a sound as of the splashing of water from a hose-pipe, and

then the ring of iron-shod boots on a cobbled pavement. "At any rate," he thought, "there is one human being about."

John opened the door in the wall and found himself in a big quadrangle of stables and cow-sheds. Not far off was a farm-lad sluicing the rough stones in front of the sheds. He had just laid down the running hose-pipe and was vigorously brushing the irregular pavement. The lad's back was turned towards Graycote, and though the latter gave one or two little coughs as a signal of his approach, the young laborer heard only the rush of the running water and the sound of his besom on the stones.

"Would you be so kind as to tell me," Graycote began, advancing towards the lad, "if Mr. South is —"

"*John!*"

The boy had thrown his broom on the stones and was looking at the palms of his hands.

"No, you mustn't shake hands, really, John. I'm much too dirty," said Jack, putting his bare arms behind his back. "Fancy you catching me like this! But, I say, Clubs — don't look like that. What's the matter?"

Graycote was standing petrified with astonishment and with his right hand still extended.

"It *can't* be you, Jack!" he exclaimed at length in a breathless sort of way.

"But it *is*, you old duffer. It's my very own self."

Jack was red enough already, but he blushed a deeper color under Graycote's short-sighted scrutiny, for his old chum was looking him over from the crown of his straw hat to the soles of his iron-plated shoes.

"My poor dear old Jack — what does it all mean!" Graycote ejaculated after a pause.

"Excuse me a moment, John. This water is running to waste. I *must* turn the tap."

Jack flew to the standing pipe and stopped the flow of water.

"That's all right," he said, clattering back over the cobbles. "Now, John, the first thing is to find my — I mean Mr. Wilson. What time is it?" he asked, taking a watch from the breast pocket of his old cricket shirt. "Getting on for twelve! John, you must be awfully hungry! I have to take the men's dinner to the field in a few minutes. Will you go with me? No, John," — with a sudden movement, "you must have something at once. Let's go inside."

John Graycote had taken possession of Jack's hands.

"Jack, you must be suffering horribly!" he exclaimed, keeping the two hands in his own.

"Not a bit of it," Jack declared with a laugh. "I'm as jolly as a sand-boy. But," as Graycote slid his arm into the other's, "I may as well tell you that I'm 'doing time.' In a day or two I shall have finished a month's hard labor."

Graycote started violently. "Surely," he ejaculated, "this is not a prison, or a reformatory!"

"John, don't be a donkey! 'Course it isn't. It's a farm, and a very jolly one. My dad's very own. I'm sent here for punishment, of course, but — however, I'll tell you all about it by and by."

"And you'll be released in a day or two?" Clubs asked anxiously.

"Can't say that, John. I fancy not. It's part of my punishment not to know when the business ends. 'Depends upon circumstances,' my father says."

"You're looking awfully well, Jack," said Graycote, still clinging affectionately to his friend's arm. "Your face is the color of my father's meerschaum pipe. Still"—with a big sigh—"you must find it fearfully hard, old chap."

"Not as hard as some fellows would, John — yourself for instance. Hello! what's that. Did you hear horse-hoofs? Then, that's the boss. Yes, here he is! John, let me introduce you."

Mr. Wilson rode into the yard and the two lads approached him. "This, sir, is Mr. Graycote. John, this is Mr. Wilson."

The farmer dismounted and took off his hat. If he had a weakness in his robust character it was that which is common to Englishmen as well as to Americans. He loved a title.

"Proud to meet you, my lord," said Mr. Wilson, remembering confusedly that Graycote was heir to a peerage. "Master South told me you were coming, but we expected you by a later train."

John explained that he had found an earlier and a more convenient train than the one he had first thought of. "And," he added, "I wanted to spend as long a time as possible with my friend here."

"I'll send somebody else with the men's dinner," Mr. Wilson whispered to Jack.

"John, old man, when you hear everything you'll chuck me," Jack said as the farmer went into the house to hurry dinner and to supervise the preparations already made for his distinguished guest.

"If you only knew how that speech hurts me," the other protested.

"Well, I've been in no end of a row. Disgraced myself horribly and got other fellows into trouble. However, we'll have a quiet hob-nob after dinner. I've got a holiday for the rest of the day, and — Oh, here's Mr. Wilson coming to take you indoors. You'll like a wash, of course."

While Graycote was being shown up to the best bedroom by his host, Jack mounted the ladder to his loft.

"There's hardly time to change my clothes," Jack reflected. "But what does it matter? He's seen me at my worst already. And I'd rather John saw me than some fellows — Davison, for instance."

• • • • •

After a dinner that, in more ways than one, was somewhat heavy, the two boys wandered into the

meadows, and lay down under the shade of a thick-leaved tree.

Jack unbosomed himself at great length.

"I think, John, I've told you everything now," he said at the finish. "I shan't be a bit surprised if you chuck me after this. You can't be friends with a chap who has been in quod, and —"

"But you haven't been in quod!" Graycote exclaimed with some vehemence, "and if you had —"

"What do you call twenty-four hours in the lock-up?" Jack interrupted. "And don't forget that we were taken through the streets chained wrist to wrist like convicts. I've carried the marks of my handcuffs until the last week or two, for I tried to break them, and they nearly broke my wrists."

"Please, please don't, Jack!" Graycote hid his face in his hands.

"Well, old man, I'll not say another word about the thing. And — well it's awfully good of you to care so much. But I wanted you to know everything. We've been chums ever since we were little brats — haven't we? — but I didn't know. I mean I didn't think —"

"Oh, Jack," the other moaned. "It's all very well for you; you've got scores of friends, I know. Everybody likes you, and — and no wonder. But it's so different with me. Actually, Jack, you're the only friend I possess — barring my father and mother. If no other argument of mine will convince you, let

this serve: I can't afford to lose you, Jack. There! it sounds horrid enough, and selfish enough, but — there it is!"

Then Jack began to console his old friend, and afterwards to chaff him. It was not long before Graycote was choking with laughter.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet and looked at his watch.

"I say!" he exclaimed, "I've missed my only train, Jack. Whatever shall I do?"

"Yoicks!" shouted Diamonds. "This is jolly! Let's go and telegraph to your mother. Wilson will be delighted to put you up. And I — well it's just scrumptious!"

"We've been clacking here for over two hours," said Clubs — not at all sorry to have lost his train. "Yet I haven't said a hundredth part of what I wanted to say."

"Nor I," said Jack. "But first of all we'll find Mr. Wilson. Then we'll go to the post-office and telegraph."

The farmer was more than pleased to give the "young lord" a bed, and began to issue orders for a mighty supper.

The post office was a mile and a half off. John began to ask his friend a thousand questions in regard to his new life.

"No, John, it's no use your trying to make me out

an agricultural student," South said after giving his friend some details of farm life. "I'm just a common, ordinary, barn-door, British cow-boy; not the cow-boy of romance, remember, but the genuine English article."

"And do you always wear this dress?" asked Clubs.

"Always — except on Sundays. I'd have changed in your honor, John — if you'd given me time; but really my Sunday suit is not very different to this — frieze instead of corduroy. Perhaps the boots weigh an ounce or two less, but they're nailed and plated pretty much like these."

"Poor old Jack!"

"John, if you didn't wear specs I'd give you one in the eye!" exclaimed the laughing Diamonds. "I can't stand being pitied. These boots are jolly comfortable, now I've got used to 'em — though they do make a bit of a row on the stones. And as for clothes — well, who cares for clothes?"

"Not I, certainly," rejoined Clubs, thinking how small was the difference they made in Jack's appearance.

Years ago a dreadfully candid nurse under notice to leave had said to Graycote — though not in South's hearing: "No amount o' fine clothes 'll ever make you look handsome, Master John. It's Master Jack South that's got the look of a young nobleman."

John thought of this speech and, without resenting it in the least, admitted its truthfulness.

When they returned from the post office, Jack took his friend to the hay-loft. Clubs was aghast. "This is much too awful!" he exclaimed with a groan.

"Now, John," cried his chum making a rush at the lanky, spectacled lad, "if you don't put in that pitying stop I'll shake you as Alice shook the Red Queen. You haven't a cozier bed than this at Graycote Hall, and as for the loft — why in the hot weather it's better than any bedroom. Look how spacious it is!"

The boys had a merry evening, and (for the first time since Jack had known him) Farmer Wilson laughed heartily — particularly when his "cowboy" sang to guitar accompaniment:

"Tis the voice of the lobster; I heard him declare,  
"You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair."

Jack could at any time have passed a searching examination in his Lewis Carroll, and, seeing that the "Alice" lyrics touched an unexpected spring of humor in his master, the boy sang and played every one of them — to Graycote's comfort and delight.

"Take a good long rest in the morning," Mr. Wilson said to Jack as he bade the boys "good-night." "You must have another bit of a holiday to-morrow. I dare say your friend won't care to go till after dinner."

. . . . .

Summer lingering warmed the lap of Autumn. The September morning was almost sultry, and the two

boys were glad to seek the river bank and there take shelter under a tent-like tree.

"This reminds me of Tishley Wood — a little bit," said Jack.

Graycote assented. "Just what I was thinking. By-the-way, Johnny Gidlow hasn't gone to Cowpool yet."

"No, I can't understand it. But he's doing well at that grammar school — isn't he?"

"Extremely well, Jack. And he's making progress in music, I hear. Going to learn harmony, and all that. But, talking of Cowpool, we've heard that Mr. Hunton is about to resign his living, and my father says that means that he's going over to Rome."

Jack was startled. He did not say so, but his thought was: "If Mr. Hunton goes over to Rome, my father and mother are sure to do the same."

They began to talk of Davison, and Jack could not help noticing that Graycote, for some reason or other, did not care to discuss Jack of Spades.

"Tell me all about your life here, Jack," Graycote said again and again; so Jack gave his chum a faithful and, at the same time, a serio-comic account of his daily doings.

Jack had never been a dandy: a well-dressed, perfectly groomed lad he had always been. This morning, in honor of his friend's visit, he had put a broad collar round the neck of his white linen jacket, and as he lay on the river bank, he looked both clean and

cool. One serious deficiency, however, he had forgotten, and as he rolled over on the grass and lifted his heavily booted feet in the air Graycote noticed that his old chum had no socks on.

"Fact is," said Jack in explanation, "I've used them all up. And really it doesn't make much difference. None of the other lads here wear socks in hot weather."

"But those tremendous heavy boots must hurt your bare feet awfully!"

"Not a bit of it," said the laughing Jack. "They don't fit so well without socks, perhaps; but all you have to do is to lace them tighter. I'm very fond of my boots, John, so don't you go detracting them. Why, they're quite a work of art. Look at that big square of hob-nails in the sole! Notice the thickness of the iron plates on the heels, and those solid lumps of the same metal on the toes! They're just lovely!"

"Jack, old man, you're being punished much too heavily," Graycote said with a sigh.

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Jack, throwing a small pebble at his chum. "I deserve all I've got, and a jolly sight more. Besides, John, I'm not a kid, and I'm not the least bit delicate. Hands and feet are getting hard as iron," he continued clapping his palms together, and making his boot heels ring as he banged one foot against the other. "Dad was quite right to punish me like this. Of course, I should like to know how long it's going to last. It'll be jolly hard if I've

to spend the winter here," he added clasping a bare ankle with his right hand. "Fancy going out into the fields at four o'clock on a winter's morning! Ugh!"

"It's not possible that you'll be here much longer?"

"Don't know about that. Dad does things very thoroughly, you know. He's awfully fond of me, and of course he'll want to make a good job of this business. Don't be surprised, John, if I'm not at Graycote for Christmas."

For several hours the two lads chatted and argued, Graycote being as determined to offer sympathy as Jack was to deprecate it — though the latter felt very lonely when his old chum had to bid him good-bye.

## CHAPTER XXII

### SEVERAL DISCOVERIES

“Therefore I do repent  
That with religion vain,  
And misconceived pain,  
I have my music bent  
To waste on bootless things its skiey-gendered rain;  
Yet shall a wiser day  
Fulfil more heavenly way,  
And with approved music clear this slip  
I trust in God most sweet;  
Meantime the silent lip,  
Meantime the climbing feet.”

—*Francis Thompson.*

Many things at Wilson's farm puzzled Jack, but its master was the greatest enigma. It was not merely that he was silent and reserved, but that his habits were so odd. On Sundays Mr. Wilson never appeared at the parish church, nor at any of the home meals. Jack for some time hesitated to question old Tom concerning his master's doings, but one Monday morning when the two were working in the fields side by side, the boy ventured to say:—

“Is Mr. Wilson a Methodist, Tom?”

“No, Master Jack, he's a Cath'lic.”

Jack hesitated for a moment, and stared at the old man inquiringly. Then with the superior knowledge

of an Anglican schoolboy he ventured to say: "I suppose you mean a *Roman* Catholic, Tom?"

"You may put Roman to 't if you've a mind. I reckon it makes no matter. There's only one sort o' Cath'lics — them what believes in t' Pope."

Jack did not take much notice of this speech as it was uttered; but it remained in his mind all the same. He was wondering if Tom himself believed in the Pope.

"Of course," the old man went on, as Jack said nothing in reply — "I don't want to interfere wi' any man's religion. I wor born and brought up a Cath'lic mysen, and a Cath'lic I'll die — if I'm in my right mind. I reckon it's only o' late years as some Protestants 'as taken to callin' 'emselves Cath'lic. Well, and I could call mysen a dook if I liked, but that wouldna mek me one — would it, Mester Jack?"

Jack laughingly admitted the argument, and the subject was dropped; but the boy did not forget Tom's words.

Another matter that puzzled Jack was the farmer's way of living. The house was a late eighteenth-century mansion, evidently containing many rooms. Jack thought it must be as big as, if not bigger than, Graycote Grange. Judging from the façade, there were large and well-furnished rooms on the ground floor, but at present Jack's view of the interior was confined to a mere glance taken in passing the windows when he was sent to sweep the gravelled walks of the garden

and lawn. It seemed more than odd that Mr. Wilson should make no use of these apartments. Of course he had a private room to which he always retired after dinner; but the only parts of the house Jack was acquainted with were the kitchen and scullery and the big room — house-place, it was called — where meals were served.

During the day, and from an early hour in the morning, Mr. Wilson could easily be accounted for; on Sundays and certain other days — market day was one of them — and in the evenings, he was never to be seen — at any rate, by Jack. Above all things the farmer was a practical man. He supervised everything, and looked to it that every man and boy earned his wages. It was only afterwards Jack found out that Mr. Wilson gave his men several shillings a week more than his neighbors paid and that the men were told to say nothing about it. It accounted in some measure for the fact that Wilson's "hands" were above the average of their kind, both in conduct and in the quality of their labor. Mr. Wilson could pick and choose his men.

Jack hated trying to pry into things, but sometimes when he was working with Tom, as he often did, he would let fall a remark that opened the flood-gates of the old man's speech.

"It's like this, Mester Jack," Tom said on one of these occasions. "Mester's niver bin t' same man since Missis died." The old gaffer proceeded to pro-

nounce a panegyric on "Missis," entering into more lengthy details of his master's family life than Jack could either grasp or remember. On one point, however, the boy was clear: Mrs. Wilson had been a remarkably good woman, and her husband was still mourning her loss.

"Mester used to be jolly enough," Tom continued; "but now-a-days he's hardly got a word to chuck at a dog — much less a smile. But he's a good mester for all that, and t' best farmer for fifty mile round."

Jack endorsed Tom's judgments heartily. In the first days of his exile at the farm, the lonely lad had greatly feared the hard-faced man; the fear was not entirely gone, but it was beginning to be mixed with liking and respect. There were times, he thought, when Mr. Wilson looked at him with kindness; but though the farmer often seemed to be on the point of uttering some sympathetic word, for the present that word remained unsaid.

The daily letters Jack received heartened him considerably. "How jolly hard it would be," he often thought, "if they didn't write to me, and if I couldn't write to them!"

Good news of his mother's health made him almost gay, and when one letter told him that, if the improvement went on, it was quite likely that she and his father would return to England in October, Jack danced a hob-nailed break-down on the floor of the barn.

"The doctors think a more bracing air will now

be good for her," said his father's letter; "and though I fear we *may* have to fly to the Riviera in November, my own hope is that, if the winter be fairly mild, we may be able to remain at Graycote permanently. I need not say, my dear lad, that directly we get home we shall pay you a visit. We are both longing for the sight of you, as you know."

Jack would have thought the stable-cleansing labors of Hercules light after such a letter as this.

The month's hard labor had seemed a very long one, yet the day came when it was alleviated. And the day was a notable one. After breakfast one morning, Mr. Wilson called Jack aside, and beckoning him upstairs, took him into an airy and well-furnished bedroom.

"You've done with the loft, my lad; for the future you'll sleep here."

Jack's gratitude was great. There were two windows in the room, and close to one of them stood a writing table. His luggage had already been removed from the loft.

"You can use it as a sitting-room after work and on Sundays," the farmer added, "and you can play your music here."

Following his master downstairs, Jack marveled when he found that the silent man had something more to say.

"I think if you get up at five in future it'll be soon enough. It's getting a bit chilly now o' mornings."

Jack had already found the coldness of the early morning in late September somewhat trying, and his daily dip in the river required courage.

"S'pose you can drive the cart into Kinchester?" Mr. Wilson inquired. "There are two or three things I want from the shops."

Jack flushed with pleasure. It was the first time he had been sent to the market town alone. This was a vote of confidence in him on Mr. Wilson's part. Moreover, there were several little things Jack himself wanted. His hair had not been cut for five weeks, and he felt that his thick black curls were lengthening uncomfortably. Then he wanted some guitar strings and several trifles of a like kind.

An hour later Jack was driving towards Kinchester at a smart trot. It was Saturday morning, and though Mr. Wilson had been to the weekly market on the previous day, he had spent so much time in striking a bargain with an obstinate neighbor that his own marketing had been to some extent neglected. Jack had a written list of errands in his pocket, and the number of shops he had to visit was large.

"Take your time, my lad," the farmer had said. "You can look about you a bit, and get some dinner at the 'George,' where you put up the horse. It'll do if you're back by four o'clock."

"It's a holiday," Jack said to himself with a happy laugh, "a regular holiday for me, and I must make

the most of it. What a good sort Wilson is, after all!"

Alternately he sang and whistled all the way to Kinchester — now thinking of the lightening of his lot — the extra hour's sleep, the new quarters; above all, of the confidence of his master.

Jack had scarcely entered the inn yard, when he saw, not Davison, but two lads wearing the caps of Davison's school. There could be no doubt about it; the odd combination of loud colors was unmistakable! Was it possible that Davison could be in the neighborhood? Johnny Gidlow had said that Jack of Spades was spending his holidays with some school chums in the country, and Kinchester was the centre of a great country district — from any part of which these fellows might have driven.

There were many reasons why Jack found the thought of Davison disconcerting. Several times during the last Christmas holidays they had met. Graycote was present once and then Spades had been very civil; but Jack had not failed to notice that when he himself was alone, Davison's manner was anything but cordial, and that on the last occasion the gardener's son made some sneering allusion to Gidlow. Jack thought little of it at the time, for the reason that his own mind was pre-occupied with the festive doings at the Hall; but it occurred to him later that there was something Spades had neither forgotten nor forgiven — in spite of the Feast of Reconciliation.

"I suspect he's still jealous of Jack of Hearts," Graycote said, when South spoke of the matter. "And I daresay he has not forgiven us for ordering him to make compensation to Johnny. If you come to think of it, we did take a rather high hand."

"Not higher than the circumstances warranted," said Jack. "Perhaps it's a pity there's been no skating this year, or any out-door sport in which he could have joined us. He feels a bit out of it, no doubt."

"Surely the fellow did not expect us to entertain him at the hall!" Graycote exclaimed. "He'll be asked to the servants' ball, of course."

Spades was asked, but he did not appear. His father explained that John had a cold.

The boys were right in their surmises. Spades had not forgiven them for forcing him to apologise to Hearts, and he *was* savagely jealous both of Hearts and Diamonds. Davison must perforce be civil to the Hon. Mr. Graycote; but as to South and Gidlow — well, let them both look out! Every dog had its day, he argued; his day would come sooner or later.

But when the gardener's son heard in a letter from home that Johnny Gidlow had been sent to school by Dr. South, and that he was now dressed "like a little lord," his annoyance and jealousy increased tenfold.

One of the commonest instincts of our nature is the quick discovery, apart from direct evidence, that we are liked or disliked. Occasionally, no doubt, the instinct is a false one; generally, nothing can be truer.

Ever since Jack's little trouble, he had felt that, as far as he knew, only one person of his acquaintance would rejoice over his fall. The person he named to himself was John Davison.

• • • • •  
The two lads who wore the pronounced colors of Davison's School were hanging about the side entrance to the "George"; but it was only when Jack had unharnessed the horse that he saw them joined by Davison himself, who suddenly appeared with a very red face at the side door of the inn. Jack hung back and watched the three swagger out of the yard.

The market ordinary was at one o'clock, and when Jack had spent an hour or two in doing his master's shopping, he found that it was time to return to the inn.

With just a passing doubt as to whether there might not be a separate table for farm hands, he took his seat. Farmers and their sons filed in rapidly, and as chair after chair was taken near his own, Jack became an amused listener to the conversation that went on around him. But he was very hungry, and the change of food was welcome, so that he did not notice the entrance of Davison and his two friends. His neighbors gave him "good-day," and looked at him inquiringly, but in a manner altogether friendly. Soon the conversation became lively, and Jack ate and listened and laughed.

It was at the removal of the joints that his attention

was caught by what seemed to be an altercation between a waiter and some tipsy person sitting a good many places below Jack, but on the same side of the table. The boy turned to see what was the matter, but his view was blocked by heads stretching forward, and he was too well-mannered to stand up in his place. A plate of apple-tart was put before him, and Jack was quite content to let the row settle itself.

But the noise only increased. One or two men sitting near Jack broke off their conversation to listen. Others followed their example, and in a few seconds only the voices of the contending parties could be heard. It was then that Jack recognised the tones of John Davison.

“I tell you that lad yonder ought not to sit down to dine with us. He’s not respectable, I tell you. He’s a jail-bird, only just let out of his cage, and I can prove it.”

Jack understood in an instant, and his heart began to beat wildly. “I’ll kill that cad in another minute,” was the thought that leapt into his mind — a thought he at once rejected with horror.

“Go and ask him to pay for his dinner,” Davison was shouting to the waiter, “then you’ll see.”

Jack pushed back his chair and rose, but the landlord of the “George” had come upon the scene. Perhaps he saw the boy’s blazing eyes; at any rate he interposed before Jack could reach Davison.

“Step this way a minute, sir,” he said politely, but

laying his hand on Jack's arm, and almost before the latter knew where he was, the two had passed into a small private room. Jack was quivering with indignation.

"What is the price of my dinner?" he demanded.

The landlord mentioned the sum. Jack promptly put it on the table. "There is one lie disproved," he exclaimed.

The landlord was eying him carefully. He was thinking that a more gentlemanly lad he had never seen. At the same time, the man was trying to account for the incongruities of Jack's dress. Speech and looks contradicted every detail of it, saving the clean turn-down collar.

"You know Mr. Wilson of Clemington?" Jack asked.

"No one better, sir," the landlord assured him.

"Then I'm in his employ. His horse and cart are in your yard. If you want to know more about me — ask him."

Jack turned on his heel and was making for the door.

"Don't, sir, I beg of you," the landlord pleaded respectfully, at the same time putting his back to the door. "The truth is, sir, the young man in there has had a little too much liquor for a lad of his age. His quarrel is with the waiter, not with you, sir. I've forbidden the man to serve him with any more drink, and, of course, he's very angry. Now I'm

sure *you're* too much of a gentleman to make a disturbance in a respectable house like mine."

Angry as he was Jack could not help smiling at the bit of flattery so adroitly introduced.

"I won't make any disturbance," said Jack turning up the cuffs of his coat, "but I'm going to thrash that cur within an inch of his life."

"But not *here*, if you please, sir," coaxed the man. "A fight at my market ordinary would ruin my house. And I do assure you, sir, he's not responsible for his words just now. He began to drink as soon as ever he came here this morning."

A sudden crash was heard in the dining-room beyond, and the noise of over-turned chairs. The landlord opened the door, and Jack was just in time to see Davison hauled from the room by his two chums and a waiter. The half-t tipsy lad had forgotten Jack for the moment; all his rage was now being vented on the waiter. But as Jack stepped forward into the dining-room Davison caught sight of him.

"Come on, you — puppy!" he shrieked, struggling to free himself. "Come on and fight it out if you are not a — coward!"

Jack stepped straight up to him, the landlord following, and imploring them not to fight.

"How can I fight a fellow who is practically drunk?" Jack said turning to the landlord. Then folding his arms and going nearer to Davison he said

in a clear, calm voice that was heard all over the room: "John Davison, you're a liar and a cad, and when you are sober I will fight you!"

The next moment Jack had re-taken his seat at the table, and Davison was being hoisted into his friend's dog-cart. Thanks to the quickness of landlord, ostler and waiter, before Jack had finished his cheese the trio were on their way home.

Such a scene as this was not at all a common one at the "George," and everybody was indignant. Jack found himself a hero. His health was drunk with enthusiasm, and certainly if the boy had accepted a third of the various drinks pressed upon him by unthinking but generous farmers, he would soon have been in worse case than Davison himself.

"That youth" (referring to Davison) "wants to be a man too soon," said Jack's right-hand neighbor. "I saw him myself drinking whiskey at half-past nine this morning. Why, he's hardly sixteen yet"—the old farmer continued turning looking at Jack. "I reckon he's about your own age."

"He's a year older, I think, and I am fifteen."

The farmer thought what a contrast the two boys had been as they stood together. Davison in a tail-coat, high stand-up collar and very tight patent leather shoes, and the boy at his side in a jacket of coarse black frieze (Jack's Sunday coat) and boots that spoke of the farm, though to-day Jack had contrived to

give them quite a high polish. Yet one was the unmistakable gentleman; the other an equally unmistakable cad.

The boy was feeling grateful to his neighbors in that they had forborne to catechise him; now, however, two middle-aged men who had been whispering together suddenly broke off. Jack caught the sound of his own surname.

“ You’ll excuse me, young gentleman,” one of them said leaning across the table, “ but might you be a son of Dr. South of Graycote? ”

“ I am his only son,” Jack answered with a blush.

The two men opposite looked at one another and nodded in a way that said as plainly as possible: “ I told you so! ”

Jack drained his glass of lemonade and rose to take his leave. He thought afterwards that his hand would be rendered useless for driving purposes — so hearty were the parting shakes he received from the guests of the “ George.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DRIVE HOME

“The saddest tears are those that never fall,  
But are held smarting in the aching eyes.  
The truest prayers can find no words at all,  
But flutter wearily to God, in sighs.”

As Jack drove home that Saturday afternoon, his feelings were mixed. He did not dwell much upon Davison's words, yet it is never pleasant to reflect that one has an enemy, and an active, unrelenting one. Jack had been so much loved all the days of his life that the thought of being hated by even one person would have caused him intense pain if he had dwelt upon it over-much. He was not going to do so, he told himself. He knew that, once roused, his own temper was a fierce one. For an instant that very day, the spirit of murder had possessed him. He shuddered at the thought of it. Supposing in the heat of his rage he had struck Davison and the blow had been a fatal one! Jack's imagination immediately pictured a crowded court — a verdict of wilful murder — a black-capped judge — a condemned cell. Would they hang a criminal of fifteen? If they did not, how horrible the alternative!

But he had not struck Davison. With the help of

God, he never would. Jack took off his hat in the lonely lane he was driving through, and vowed that, whatever might happen, he would never lift a hand against John Davison.

Jack had often asked for help; he had never prayed as he did to-day. His need for the future was great. No wonder, perhaps, if his sin of disobedience at Lacton followed him everywhere. All his life through, perhaps, it would constantly find him out. He would never be able to give the lie to anyone who said that he had been in the hands of the police; but that he was a jail-bird, as Spades had asserted, that he could deny. After all, a scrape of this kind could be lived down. Life was all before him, and no one could make him sin against his will.

Merlin's words to Vivien came into his mind, and he repeated aloud :

"The sin that practice burns into the blood,  
And not the one dark hour which brings remorse,  
Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be."

. . . . .

Jack was not given to self-analysis. His mind was of the order that rejects gloomy thoughts, simply because they are gloomy. In past times he had frequently taken John Graycote to task for his knack of dwelling — not on the unwholesome; neither lad could tolerate that — but on the needlessly painful and the gratuitously saddening. Jack had come into the world with many gifts, and equal to his apprecia-

tion of the beautiful in music and song was his sense of the humorous. It was this last that made him so popular with his own kind, and its possession saved him from much self-conceit and from the making of many mistakes. From his birth, too, he had enjoyed that soundness of body which can never be without its effect upon the mind, and the simple, cheery, open-air life of the country, both at home and at school, had brought him to the age of fifteen, straight of limb and sound of mind, clear of eye and steady of hand.

Certainly the past year had been a trying one, both for mind and body, and, as Jack had moved about meadow and farmyard, he frequently reviewed its events — not of set purpose, but because, do what he would, the mental panorama of those unhappy months would unroll itself. He was sometimes disposed to blame circumstances; and, certainly, Opportunity is a great factor in the life of every boy and every man. Some good people never make sufficient allowance for it.

“It was Christmas at the Hall that threw me out of gear,” he sometimes thought. “What a pity mother and father were obliged to go abroad just then!” But memory took him back a little further and showed him pictures of the summer holidays of last year and the school term from September to Christmas. It was then, Jack confessed to himself, that he had begun to deteriorate. Then had started, or rather, had increased — for its beginning dated from a still earlier

time — that seeming insuperable inability to work steadily. It was then he had allowed the music mania to master him. At the time itself he had felt helpless and irresponsible; he knew now that this was an error. Of course those weeks at the Hall had riveted the chains he had put upon himself: equally of course, the Bazaar proceedings of Easter had doubled and trebled his weight of fetters.

The mystery of life may, and often does, weigh heavily upon the growing boy: there were moments when Jack found its burden almost intolerable. Happily, they were moments only. Thanks to his healthy bringing up and the love that had never been denied him, both mind and body were too robust to be lastingly hurt by painful thoughts. He fought against them, and they disappeared — for a time at least; and when they returned, as often as not his mind had regained its balance and was occupied by healthier matter. Once or twice in his earlier days at the farm he had dreamed distressing dreams of Lacton — waking and springing up with a great cry to find himself — not in the cells, or in the prisoner's dock, as he had thought, but lying in his bed in the moon lit hayloft. At such times his after-sleep was very sweet.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### DAY DREAMS

“Nor shall the autumn strike us dumb.  
Who knows what fruit for us shall be  
Swung in some ruddy-hearted tree:  
What hopes shall find their harvesting  
When outward birds are on the wing.”

—*Katherine Tynan.*

On that Saturday night, Jack's sleep was more than sweet. For a sense of greater closeness to the old boy-life was upon him, and, though all the long night through he could never reach those arms that had enfolded him as a little baby, as a tired child, as a mother-loving boy, he seemed to experience the restful feeling that all was well and that the one who loved him most was very near.

The comfortable, neat-looking bedroom may have had something to do with it, but his mother's recent letter had much more, and when he awoke and saw —

“The ever-silent spaces of the East,  
Far-folded mists and gleaming halls of morn,”

he turned by a sort of new spiritual instinct to the Lord whose Day had just begun.

During these times Jack noticed and fell in love with many things he had not studied or greatly cared

for before. The dawn fascinated him, and the changing tints of autumn thrilled him. He had always loved nature in his own way; but the absence of a score of interests that, as a school-boy, had filled his mind and given him small leisure for observation, left his soul in a receptive and meditative mood to which he had been almost a stranger in the past. No one had ever enjoyed the charm of sunshine more than Jack, or been more alive to the tender loveliness of spring or the riper beauties of summer. He had even been "tolerant of the colder time," and had noticed "the branching grace of leafless elm, or naked lime." But the subtler and more hidden sweetness of the earth as God made it had hitherto eluded him. His mind was now lying fallow.

In the beginning of his new life he had been conscious of little save the heat and benumbing effects of unaccustomed labor. The muscular strain was great and connected thought impossible. Now he had reached the period of doing mechanical things in a mechanical way; they were not done less well because of this. The nerve strain was small, and the boy's mind began to feed upon all that he saw. The autumn dawn sang to him, and he must needs respond. The gathering of harvest gold mingled with the blood of poppies inspired him. The sounds and scents of farm life took a fresh meaning. He had done his Homer and Virgil badly enough in the near past; but stray reminiscences of both came back to him as he

trod the stubble, or wetted his iron clamped feet with the morning dew of the meadows, and life became an idyl of many parts, each crowned with a happy song. He was sent to the orchard to pick the crimson and russet fruit, and the apples clustered for him like sweet baby faces newly kissed by their mother the sun, or bearing upon their smooth cheeks the diamond tears of a passing shower. The wooden yoke pressed heavily upon his young shoulders; but each polished pail became a reservoir of snowy, foaming, Homeric milk. His blood tingled with constant exercise in the chilly mornings and chillier evenings, and the red stream coursed merrily through his veins as he splashed the icy water over his tired limbs. Life grew very gladsome and good, and the evening music of his lute was jubilant.

Jack did not think himself religious. He was at once far more pagan and far more Christian than he knew. But the quasi-paganism of him was innocent, because it was natural and pure. His spiritual lights had hitherto been uncertain and dim. What he knew to be right and good he practised. He was impressed with the necessity of prayer. Feeling his need of it, he never omitted, twice a day, to kneel down and speak to the God who made him. Boys, as well as men, had souls, he reminded himself, and the young, as well as the old, sometimes died. "The child must have its mother: my soul must have its God." He had never read these words, but the sense of them was

in his mind. Without prayer his loneliness would have grown intolerable. His father and mother had not even forsaken him temporarily; still he felt deeply the need of being in touch with his Maker. There were times, even, when Jack exaggerated his faults, for he had not yet learned to distinguish between the accidental results of a mistaken course of action, and a wilful infringement of the Divine law. He had much to learn, but, thanks to his training, he was teachable.

Sad as Dr. South had been on the morning he sent his son to Wilson's, the father could not help laughing when Jack showed him the half-dozen books he had selected. It seemed such an exceedingly far cry from Pindar's Odes — a new translation the Doctor had just bought — to one of Ballantyne's boy stories. That Jack should take a prayer book was of course. It was the book of Common Prayer, bound up incongruously enough, with a high-church manual of devotions selected entirely from Catholic sources. Caverley's verses and one of Lewis Carroll's books did not surprise the Doctor, but he was not quite prepared for the big volume of Tennyson. He certainly thought the sack very much in excess of the bread, but he made no comment; except that as Jack was leaving the room with his books in his arms his father said quietly: "Have you room for a New Testament, my dear?"

"Oh, I've put that in, father," the boy said. "I knew you wouldn't want me to ask leave for *that*."

Jack spoke very simply, but the words made his father happy.

This then had been Jack's library for the last month. Now that he had a real bedroom he could display his seven books and the magazines that regularly reached him. He read a little every night, and, in order not to get into arrears with his correspondence, made a point of writing at least a few paragraphs each day. It was seldom a morning passed without his receiving a letter. His sisters were excellent correspondents, and John Graycote now wrote every week. Moreover, his old chums having reassembled at Beechwood — saving the three who had been his companions in the Lacton scrape — began to pelt him with letters, each one of which was a series of notes of interrogation.

## CHAPTER XXV

### IN MOTHER'S ARMS

“His heart's a drop-well of tranquillity.”

Jack was turning the handle of a hay-chopper, and his brow dripped with perspiration. The entry of Mr. Wilson made him look up with surprise. There was an unusually happy look upon the farmer's face, but all he said was: “I reckon that'll have to do for to-day. Better go into the house and see who's there.”

The boy did not even stop to unroll his shirt sleeves, or put on his jacket, but ran down from the chopping chamber and across the yard at full speed. A minute later he was lying in his mother's arms, his own bare arms locked about her neck.

“The smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed,” Mrs. South was saying to her boy.

Jack had seated himself between father and mother — forgetful of everything but the great fact that he was near them. Suddenly it occurred to him that he was coatless and waistcoatless.

"I'm so sorry, mother," he said gently disengaging the hand she still held, and pulling down the sleeves of his white flannel shirt. "I'll change my clothes — if I may, father."

"We've come to see you, dear lad, not your clothes," said the Doctor affectionately. "Mother was quite prepared for your working costume, Jack; but is that really a belt?" he asked laying his hand on the broad thick strap Jack wore instead of braces, "or is it a piece of horse harness?"

Jack could not reply, for his mother had suddenly seized him and was laying his head upon her shoulder.

"My darling Jack!" she murmured again and again as she kissed his lips, and brushed the short black curls from his wet forehead.

Mother and father and son were trying hard not to break down in the joy of their reunion; but as Jack felt his mother's tears falling upon his face he could not help sobbing aloud.

• • • • •

There were no signs of mourning in the merry trio that set out after luncheon to visit the farm. Jack's pride in showing the place was not lessened when he suddenly remembered that, of course, his father knew every square inch of it. The Doctor, however, was delighted to find that his son was really in love with his new life.

"If the early winter be mild," mother was saying,

"we shall certainly remain at Graycote for Christmas. Indeed, I am hoping that we may settle down at home for the whole winter."

Jack's eyes were fixed alternately on father and mother; both noticed that their son's look was an inquiring one.

"What do you say, Jack,"—Dr. South burst out at length—"what do you say to remaining here till Christmas? You are looking so strong and hearty that I cannot find it in my heart to make you settle down to schoolwork for some time to come. But after Christmas, Jack, the old life may begin again."

Jack tried to speak and failed, but it was of no consequence. Both mother and father saw the joy and gratitude in every line of their son's face.

For that day Farmer Wilson entirely effaced himself. It had already been arranged that Mrs. and Dr. South should spend a night or two at the farm, and Jack found himself playing the host—to his confusion and delight. He marvelled at the display of glass and silver on the dining-table—a much greater show than had been set out for Graycote.

But Jack's greatest surprise came at night when dinner was over, and he and his father and mother were sitting before the fire in the old-fashioned drawing-room.

"I did not want to write it, Jack," the Doctor was saying, "though little by little, I trust, I have prepared

your mind for this important item of news. Can you guess what I'm going to say, Jack?"

"I think I can," the boy said after a pause and looking a little scared. "You have left the Church of England, father,—and mother?" he ventured, looking inquiringly at the latter.

"Both of us, dear," Mrs. South said taking her son's hand. "We were received into the Catholic Church just three days ago."

"I'm so glad," the boy said simply. "Of course I don't know much about it, but I always felt the Church of England couldn't be *really* Catholic, you know."

They pressed him for his reasons and he gave them very readily.

"It seemed to me that if the Church of England had been really Catholic you wouldn't have had all those difficulties when you were abroad. You know, father, you told me how you and mother were bothered. And then, of course, in a really Catholic Church one ought to be able to go to confession to any clergyman. I wanted awfully to go here; but from what the vicar said about absolution in the pulpit, I knew it was of no use my going to *him*. Then at Beechwood it was always a difficulty. Two or three of the masters who were clergymen used to laugh at confession and sneer at the boys who went, and only Dr. Higham and the chaplain, who was just ordained, would ever hear one of us. I knew there was something wrong — somewhere."

Mother and father and son sat very late that night talking of the religion so new to them, yet so old in itself.

“When can I be received, father?” Jack said as he rose to light the bedroom candles.

“You will have to be instructed first, Jack. I fancy the nearest Catholic Church is four or five miles from here — is it not? Well, we’ll ask Mr. Wilson what arrangements can be made.”

“But, my darling, you can share our night prayers,” said Mrs. South to Jack, and looking towards her husband. The Doctor assented heartily.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### INSTRUCTION

“While soul, sky, and music blend together,  
Let me give thanks even for those griefs in me,  
The restless windward stirrings of whose feather,  
Prove them the brood of immortality.”

—*Francis Thompson.*

When father and mother left the farm, a great loneliness fell upon Jack. Cold October rains began to flood the fields, and the farm-yard itself became a standing pool. The poetry of summer and autumn had fled — seemingly for ever, and Jack’s spirits sank alarmingly. A little discontent seized him, and the temptation to repine became severe.

The ever observant Mr. Wilson saw everything, said little and did much. He gave Jack another hour of sleep in the morning, and told him to consider his work at an end when the clock struck five in the evening. Soon afterwards the boy found a bright fire lighted in his room at night, and the big bedchamber itself made into a really cosy parlor. There came entire days of steady rain and blustering winds, when the farmer would let him do nothing beyond milking and a little wood-chopping in a dry shed; Jack’s spir-

its revived, and he began to feel something like affectionate gratitude towards Mr. Wilson.

The principal event of these late autumn days was Jack's instruction in Christian Doctrine. Three times in the week the boy rode over to the priest's house at Kipleigh, greatly rejoicing the heart of Father Rawlings by his eager desire to know "everything," and his intelligent understanding of the catechism.

"I have no excuse for putting you off, my boy," said the priest early in December, and in answer to Jack's pleading question as to how soon he might be received.

"Mother thought I might perhaps be received at Christmas when I go home. But if you, Father, think I know enough, I should like you to receive me here. Of course father and mother could come over for it. And you have been so kind to me, Father, and —"

"And you have been so earnest and attentive, my child," said the priest, smiling at Jack's eager speech. "If it could be arranged I should like to receive you on the Feast of St. Nicholas, the patron of boys, and give you your First Communion on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception."

It was arranged, and on the morning of the eighth of December Jack knelt between father and mother in the little Church of Kipleigh, to receive for the first time "the Bread that cometh down from Heaven."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### CHRISTMAS

“Nor shall we dread the winter blast  
Or the long evening of our year  
With nothing more to hope or fear:  
Looking to keep Christ’s festival  
In his own fair and lighted hall.  
After the longest night is done,  
Cometh the Christmas benison.”

—Katherine Tynan.

Jack’s Christmases had always been fairly full of surprises, but the present one was crammed with them. He reached Graycote Grange on the evening of the twenty-third, and the first person he recognised after receiving his father’s and mother’s warm and prolonged greeting was Mr. Hunton. He had known long ago of the old clergyman’s conversion, but his presence at Graycote had been kept secret from Jack, and the surprise was a happy one.

But it was when mother whispered to her boy, “Shall we make a little visit, my darling?” that Jack received his greatest shock of delightful surprise. There had always been an oratory at Graycote Grange, at any rate within the memory of Jack; now he found it greatly enlarged and arranged like a chapel in daily use.

"Yes, dear," Mrs. South whispered on the threshold, "we have the Blessed Sacrament! Permission for it came only two days ago!"

• • • • •  
"You'll tell me all about the chaplain, mother, won't you? Fancy letting me find him out by myself," Jack was saying. "He looks very old, but I like him awfully."

"He is a convert like ourselves," said Mrs. South, "only he has been a Catholic forty years or more."

"But won't Mr. Hunton become a priest?" Jack asked.

"No, dear. His humility will not let him seek orders."

But it was only after the lapse of several days Jack received another surprise, in the shape of news that Mr. Hunton was to be his tutor for the present.

"I say, though, father, it was downright mean of you not to tell me about Johnny Gidlow," Jack laughingly declared as the family sat down to breakfast on the morning of the twenty-fourth. "Fancy my finding him actually serving Mass!"

"The strangest part of it is that he was not converted by us," said the Doctor, "though of course people will say we influenced him. I did not even know that he had any inclination towards the Church until he told me he wished to place himself under instruction. It seems there is a Catholic Professor of

Music at the school he goes to, and during the dinner hour the two have talked together about religion. The Professor is organist at the Catholic Church, and one day he persuaded Johnny, with his mother's leave, to sing at a High Mass. Then Johnny heard a sermon which made a great impression upon him, and he had an interview with the preacher. The poor boy was delighted when, telling me of his difficulties and asking my advice, he found that we were about to be received."

It was the most joyous Christmas Jack had ever known. He could not tear himself away from mother and father and sisters for a single hour, and if they had not accompanied him in his walks, he would not have taken needful exercise.

"Come here, John, as often as ever you like," he said to Graycote on Christmas-day; "but don't, *please* don't ask me to the Hall — at any rate for a week or two. Of course I'll call on Lady Graycote, but positively I can't accept any invitation at present."

John was at first inclined to grumble, but seeing that he really had the run of the Grange he became magnanimous, and not a day of the Christmas holidays passed without his presence at luncheon or dinner, or, at the very least, afternoon tea. Never had the "Bin" witnessed such merry meetings. Jack's only regret was that the Quartette remained incomplete, but after what had happened, it seemed impossible to include Davi-

son in the daily joyous doings of the Grange. Johnny almost lived in the house, and Graycote's greatest treat was to listen to South and Gidlow singing duets.

"Hearts is improving enormously," said John on one occasion to Jack. "He was always good, but he is beginning to sing with wonderful taste and expression — don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes," rejoined Jack. "But I forgot to tell you that he is having regular lessons now, both in music and singing. My father is giving him a musical education. Some day Johnny will be a professor — if not a composer. Dad gave him the choice of several professions, but Johnny's heart was set upon music."

"Like your own, Jack."

"Don't know about myself, John. In fact I feel inclined to chuck it."

"What! give up music, with all your talent?"

"As a profession, certainly. For the amusement of my friends and myself, of course not. In this matter I'm going to be guided by my father and mother. To tell you the truth, John — though I hope to go to Oxford with you, and am pretty sure we shall take our degrees together, I feel greatly drawn towards agriculture and a country life; and I found out only the other day that my father has settled the Clemington Farm upon me and that, years hence, when Mr. Wilson retires, dad would like me to take it up."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Graycote. "You'll make an ideal country gentleman."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A HARMONIOUS TRIO

“My will is something sorted with his wish:  
Muse not that I thus suddenly proceed;  
For what I will, I will, and there an end.”

— *Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

The conversion of the South family to the Catholic Church caused some excitement in Graycote. At the Hall it was much discussed and severely condemned; at first it seemed likely that the event would cause a lasting rupture in the friendship that existed between the Graycotes and the Souths. The rector was more than angry and tried to induce Lady Graycote to forbid any communication between her son and Jack South. To this however, she would not listen. Several members of her own family were Catholics, she said, and Lord Graycote’s uncle — from whom there were expectations — had been received into the Church only the year before.

So, in spite of everything, Diamonds and Clubs met frequently and enjoyed each other’s society to the full. John indeed was overjoyed when he found that Jack was likely to remain at home under the tutorial care of the chaplain, Father Digby, and Mr. Hunton.

The Christmas holidays passed quickly enough, and

Jack enjoyed them to the full — spending them for the most part in the dear home circle from which he had so long been excluded. The winter was an exceedingly mild one, and Mrs. South's health seemed to be entirely established. The Graycotes gave their annual ball, and, to the disgust of the rector, the Souths were invited as usual. Jack saw something of his old chum every day, but it was noticeable that John was much more frequently at the Grange than Jack was at the Hall. Indeed, young Graycote began to haunt Mrs. South's drawing-room more than ever.

“I don't know how it is, Jack,” he said one January afternoon as he and Diamonds were returning from a long ramble, “I always feel so jolly at your house. There's always something going on, and — well, it's so homely; I mean *really* like home, you know; and then, everybody's so genial.”

“So glad you think so,” cried Jack. “Of course we're a bigger family than you are and — all that. When I was at Wilson's I used to try not to think of home, for every time the old place came before my mind, I got a strange dull pain somewhere or other, and it was all I could do not to blub like a kid. Wasn't it awfully good of Dad to let me off after those four months! Before I left, Wilson told me that if I'd been refractory I should have had a whole year!”

“It would have killed you, old chap!”

“Not a bit of it, John! Why I'm twice the fellow I was — muscularly and otherwise. And after being

away from my books so long, I feel that I can study now till all's blue."

"And what are you going to prepare for, Jack?"

"Oxford, as I told you. Both Father Digby and Mr. Hunton are Oxford men, and they are going to coach me, you know."

"But you won't go up for some time to come?"

"Of course not. I shall wait for you. We're only fifteen and a-half, so we shall be here for two years or more. You see I've been an awfully lazy beggar and have got to make up for no end of lost time."

"You'll do that all right, Jack."

"Hope so. I'm going to try jolly hard, I can tell you. It's wonderful what a chap can do when he really tries. Take Johnny Gidlow for instance. Actually the young beggar is half way through his Cæsar, and this time last year he didn't know *mensa*! He'll beat me yet if I'm not sharp. Dad is awfully pleased with what he calls his experiment."

"Naturally," said Graycote. "By the way, talking of Hearts reminds me of Spades. Have you seen Davison these holidays, Jack?"

"Several times. And he always looked mighty sulky, I can tell you. I'm afraid there'll be a row sooner or later. Our Quartette is hopelessly broken up, I fancy."

"A harmonious Trio is better than a discordant Quartette."

"True, John. Perhaps I was over hasty in form-

ing the latter. Still it's nice to be civil to one's neighbors."

"The incivility is all on Davison's side," Graycote remarked.

"That's a fact. And of course it doesn't matter a rap to us. I'm only afraid for Johnny Gidlow. Davison's jealousy of him is sure to increase now that Hearts is raised — well, above the level of Spades, at least. You see, Gidlow is quite two years younger than Davison, and in a quarrel, or a fight, Johnny could hardly hold his own."

"Davison would be afraid of your father, if not of yourself."

"No doubt. But then, you see, Spades seems to have so little self-control when he is roused. I'm awfully afraid there'll be a shindy before long. But come in and have some tea, John," South continued as the two stopped at the gates of the Grange.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A FULFILLED PROPHECY

“Of all foul things in beast or bird,  
Or in men’s hearts that be,  
This, the foul fiend of cruelty  
Our father most abhorred.”

Unhappily, Jack’s prophecy became a true one, and the shindy turned out to be a far more serious affair than he had anticipated.

It seemed that frequently during the holidays Davison had been in the habit of waylaying Johnny Gidlow, and, fearful of proceeding further, had called him all sorts of names and heaped upon him every disgusting title he could invent. Johnny had said nothing of this to a single soul. Very wisely, too, he had passed Davison by without replying to him, and, as far as possible, had kept out of the big lad’s way. Unfortunately this apparent indifference only served to increase Davison’s wrath.

Johnny Gidlow little guessed that Davison was trying to create an opportunity for playing his trump card. This card was in the shape of a photograph — a snap-shot taken at Lacton-on-the-Sea. For, among the crowd on the sands at the time of Jack’s arrest, there had been several of Davison’s schoolfellows —

one of them provided with a camera. This youth had taken several shots at Jack and his friends, and when he returned to school was able to give quite an exhibition of those "Extraordinary Proceedings at Lacton," recorded in the local papers. Davison saw his opportunity at once, and though the young photographer drove a very hard bargain, Jack of Spades was able to return home for the Christmas holidays with one of these damaging pictures in his possession. It was quite the best of the set, from the snap-shooter's point of view, being taken just as the four prisoners had left the crowd on the beach and before they began to be surrounded by the rabble of the streets. Jack's face and handcuffed wrists were particularly prominent, for he was a little ahead of the others and seemed to be dragging them along.

For months Davison had gloated over this photograph. What particular use to make of it was his only difficulty. His first intention had been to send it as a Christmas card to Jack's mother. He did not do so, because he reflected that once the thing was out of his hands it would be lost. It would be something to destroy the happiness both of Jack and his mother on such a day, but then the jealous, cruel-hearted lad did not want to lose the photograph. He foresaw great possibilities of "fun," not to say of revenge, in the possession of a picture of this sort.

But when Christmas had gone by, Davison almost regretted that he had not acted upon his original reso-

lution. There was no one in Graycote who disliked Jack South; there were many who loved him. To harrow the feelings of the latter was something, but it was not enough. After all, Davison thought, it would be better to use the thing in a way that would cause most pain, and that would certainly be to send it to Mrs. South. But before he did so, he would take care that Johnny Gidlow had a sight of it. This at any rate would insure South's knowing that the photograph had been in his (Davison's) possession.

It was a day of two after Jack had made his prophecy, and the Christmas holidays were all but over. Johnny himself was taking a short cut to the Grange, when he suddenly came face to face with Davison. The road was a very narrow one, a sort of bridle-path, with a low stone wall on one side and a hedge on the other. Gidlow would have passed on, but Davison barred the way. There was a diabolical smile on the latter's face as he said: "Wait a moment! I've got something to show you." It was the first time since he came home from school that Davison had met the other without using abusive language, and for a moment Johnny was off his guard.

"I've got something here that Jack South would give his head for," began Davison, taking an envelope from his pocket and clasping it between his two hands. "Like to see it?"

Johnny was anxious to know what the something might be, but he answered stoutly and promptly —

"No, thanks. *I* don't want to see it," and he made as though he would pass on.

"But you've got to see it," said Davison, stepping in front of Gidlow and at the same time taking the photograph from the envelope. "There! what do you think of that? There's your precious Master Jack with a steel bracelet on each wrist! Pretty picture that — ain't it?"

With his right hand Davison seized the small boy by the scruff of the neck; in his left he held the photograph in front of the unwilling spectator. For a moment Johnny turned pale as he looked at the picture of his hero and friend being led through the streets in handcuffs. Then the younger boy made a big resolve. Davison's grip upon his neck was a tight one, but his hands were free. A moment's hesitation, and Johnny suddenly snatched the photograph out of the big lad's hand, and tore it into little pieces. "I don't care if you kill me," he said in a trembling voice, and taking a glance at Davison's murderous face. Then he felt himself seized — knew that he had received two awful blows on the head and that he was being thrown with great violence against the stone wall.

After that for many long hours Johnny Gidlow knew nothing.

## CHAPTER XXX

### NEMESIS

“ My conscience ! thou art fetter’d  
More than my shanks and wrists : you good gods, give me  
The penitent instrument to pick that bolt,  
Then, free for ever ! ”

— *Cymbeline.*

If Davison had been inclined to run away from the presence of his victim, he could not have done so. A great shriek had made itself heard in that quiet spot, and two farm laborers who had seen the altercation from a distance ran across the field and climbed over the stone wall almost before Davison realised what had happened.

“ I reckon you’ve done for him,” said one of the men as he knelt down and raised Johnny’s head. A broad stream of blood was flowing from a deep wound in the forehead and a little crimson pool already lay in the mud of the road-side.

The other man put his finger to his mouth and blew a piercing whistle to attract the attention of a group of men working in the near distance. They were soon on the spot and the man who was bending over Johnny gave his orders with great promptness.

“ One of ye run for Dr. South, quick as ye can.

Tom, you keep your eye on young Davison while Joe fetches t'bobby."

The man had taken Johnny's handkerchief and was clumsily, but tenderly, trying to stop the flow of blood. Davison stood near trembling and with his eyes fixed upon his victim. He tried to ask if the bleeding boy lived, but he found himself tongue-tied.

Only a single meadow separated them from the Grange, and in a few minutes the Doctor had taken the place of the well-intentioned but helpless laborer.

"Two of you carry him very gently to my house," he said at length and when he had partially staunched the bleeding. "Go very slowly! No, stop! I'll take his head myself."

The Doctor gave one glance at Davison but said nothing. The village policeman was already in sight.

"I didn't mean to hurt him—much," Davison faltered as the officer came up. "He hit his head against the wall there. It was only an accident, you know. You can't lock me up for a thing like that."

The policeman was not a wordy man. He gave his prisoner the usual caution, as he dived into his pocket for the handcuffs.

"Nay, lad," he said as Davison stepped back protestingly, "you *must* have 'em on. Serious job, this. T'other hand as well. You're a big strong chap now, and I'm responsible for you till you get to Linborough."

As Davison was led away, the last objects that met

his eye were the little pool of blood and, lying near it, some tiny scraps of a photograph.

The insecurity of Graycote lock-up was well known, and it was seldom that a prisoner was left there for the night; so an hour later a cart drove up to take John Davison to Linborough. The whole village had assembled about the lock-up, and as the prisoner was led out, cries of "Shame" saluted him and added to his misery. Once in the cart, he tried without success to hide his fettered hands, and his last mortification, as the driver turned the corner of the village street, was to meet the eyes of Jack South and Graycote. No word or sign passed between them, but he could not help seeing that their faces were sorrowful. Were they pitying him or Johnny Gidlow? Was it possible that the latter was dead?

Johnny was not dead, but he still lay unconscious. His own mother sat watching him, and Dr. South was constantly present. Jack was not allowed to see his poor little friend and spent a miserable day with Graycote wandering about the fields and now and then making a rush into the Grange to ask eager questions. He was sorry for Davison and for his parents. Dr. South pronounced the wound a very serious one, and admitted that Johnny was in great danger, Davison would escape the charge of wilful murder, possibly that of manslaughter; but, it was said, for such a murderous assault he could not possibly escape a term of imprisonment. He had turned sixteen, and

his dress and appearance made him look much older.

Very late that night Johnny recovered consciousness. The Doctor just looked into Jack's room, scarcely expecting to find his son awake, but the boy had not slept a wink, he said. He was at once delighted and consoled with his father's news and pleaded hard to be allowed to see Johnny, but this the Doctor would not hear of.

"He must be kept absolutely quiet," Doctor South said. "An hour or two ago, we removed him to the remotest room in the house — the old panelled chamber with the double doors. It will be a long business, Jack. Pray for the best, old man. And don't forget to pray for that unhappy Davison."

"I will pray for both, father," said Jack with a sob.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### JACK'S SCRUPLES

“Who alone suffers, suffers most i’ the mind;  
Leaving free things and happy shows behind:  
But then the mind much sufferance doth o’erskip  
When grief hath mates, and bearing fellowship.”

—*King Lear.*

Two months later, and just as March was beginning to grow mild, Johnny left the house for the first time. He looked very pale and feeble, but a happy smile played about his face as he sighted the almond blossoms and the daffodils. Both Jack and John were in attendance, and their spirits were high.

The past eight or nine weeks had been an anxious time for all concerned. Johnny had suffered all the horrors of brain-fever, and for a week or more it was thought that his mind would be permanently affected. Now, however, the Doctor felt satisfied that the scar on his forehead was the only lasting reminder of his grievous injury Johnny would retain.

Davison’s trial had come off at the Linborough Assizes, late in February. The judge had taken a severe view of the case, describing it as a very cowardly assault and remarking that but for the Doctor’s assurance that the injured boy was likely to recover, the

sentence would have been a much heavier one. Davision was sent to hard labor for six months.

The three Jacks, while feeling that the punishment was deserved, were deeply sorry for the culprit, and Johnny Gidlow himself cried bitterly when he heard that, in consequence of their son's disgrace, Mr. and Mrs. Davison had left Graycote.

It was long before Jack South heard the full details of the incident that provoked Davison to attack Johnny so savagely. Neither he nor Graycote had been present at the trial; but, as a matter of fact, Davison was too much ashamed of the episode of the photograph to make its destruction an argument for his own defence, and would only say that Gidlow had angered him.

“Oh, John, what a funny thing life is!” South exclaimed mournfully when, one day, after an hour's cross-questioning he had forced Gidlow to tell him the circumstances that led to the assault. “You see it's my fault after all! If I hadn't got into that mess at Lacton, the photograph wouldn't have been in existence; Johnny wouldn't have suffered all these weeks, and Davison wouldn't be in prison. How horribly one thing seems to depend upon another in this world!”

Graycote reasoned with his chum as best he could, but it was only after a long talk with his father that Jack ceased to torture himself.

“At any rate,” Dr. South said, after talking for

some time of first and secondary causes, "you cannot blame yourself for Davison's jealousy and malice. It is clear that the wretched lad had a most unreasonable spite against both yourself and Johnny. He had brooded over some fancied injury until it became a monomania. The evidence given at the trial surprised even me. One witness said that Davison had frequently threatened to 'do' for Gidlow and that they never met without the use of most disgusting language on the part of the prisoner. Then it came out that Davison was in the habit of drinking — even in the morning and that on the day of the assault he had just left the 'Graycote Arms.' No one had ever seen him drunk, but it is evident that he had fallen into the habit of tippling. Now, you see, Jack, you can't possibly blame yourself for these things, any more than for Davison's natural disposition which, as I know, has always been a sulky one. The truth is, Jack, that unhappy lad has ruined himself by aping the habits and vices of a man long before he has acquired a man's years. Moreover, he wanted to be something very much above his station. How far all this is due to excessive indulgence on the part of his mother and excessive severity on his father's side, it is not for me to say, but it seems notorious in the village that his mother was always supplying him with money, and that he was often treated with harshness by his father."

But it required several talks of this kind, both with

the Doctor and Father Digby, before Jack partially exonerated himself from being the cause of all the misery of the past two months, and it was some time before the boy regained his old elasticity.

Davison had in reality sprung from a very humble and, what is far more to the point, a very coarse stock. Years before the birth of his youngest son, Davison senior had been a gardener's laborer with the minimum of skill and taste. Little by little, however, he had pushed himself to the front, and as Lord Graycote cared little for horticulture and very much for the great kitchen garden that, as has been said, was a considerable source of profit, Davison had gradually qualified himself for the post of head gardener. He was a man entirely without education, and his wife, who had been a housemaid at the Hall, was barely able to read or write. John was their third son, and his two brothers were little more than laborers, one on a farm in a neighboring village, the other in a large nursery garden some distance from Graycote. It had been the mother's resolution that John should be a gentleman. Her proposal that he should be sent to a boarding-school had at first been scouted by her husband, but as she persisted in her entreaties Davison at length gave way, and, at the age of thirteen, John was taken from the village school, clad in garments that were something better than the Sunday suit he had hitherto worn and sent off to a famous "Academy for young gentlemen" in a town about twenty miles

from his native village. The change of life completely turned his head, and he had not been long at school before he was nick-named 'the Swag,' which was short for swaggerer. Of course, he betrayed his origin at every point. His accent and manner were very defective, and but for his physical strength, which was considerable, he would have been scoffed at to desperation. He was clever, and made progress. His accent became a trifle less bucolic, and he tried to make up in dress what he lacked in personal appearance and good breeding. He had always been jealous of South's intimacy with Graycote, and latterly his spite against Johnny Gidlow had, as the Doctor said, amounted to monomania.

But Davison's capital error had been the aping not merely the dress and manners of a grown-up man, but the vices of some dissolute young farmers with whom he had stayed during the summer holidays and who had younger brothers at the school to which he had been sent. These young men had, unhappily, lost their father and mother, and their eldest brother was their guardian. The household was notorious for its dissoluteness; but all that the elder Davison knew of it was that his son was at school with its younger inmates. And being at such a school, the gardener argued, his son's companions must be respectable. In after years the younger Davison admitted that they had completed his ruin.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE QUALITY OF MERCY

“Let your love be wide as His,  
With the whole world round his knees;  
Gather into your warm heart  
All His creatures—not a part;  
So your love shall be like His.”

Tishley Wood is again ringing with music and laughter. It is Jack South's seventeenth birthday and is being celebrated by a great picnic. The three Jacks have come by boat, as on the famous occasion two years ago. Doctor and Mrs. South and their daughters have driven, and at this moment the girls are laying the cloths on the grass and opening savory-smelling hampers. It has been decided that Jack must be waited upon to-day, and not be permitted to do anything save eat and drink, laugh and play. Sing, alas, he cannot, for his voice is breaking and he is bidden to rest it for a time.

The three lads have wandered away into the heart of the wood. A moment ago you might have heard the twanging of Jack's guitar in the distance, and the ring of Johnny's soprano—clear and fresh as ever.

The music has ceased for a time. The boys are getting deeper and deeper into the pleasant gloom

of the pines, and as they do so they grow silent for a space. Jack is the first to speak.

“I can’t get the thought of Davison out of my head this morning.”

“Nor I,” said Graycote. “Though I did not mention his name, I was thinking of him all the way up the river. Has anything been heard of him lately?”

Jack shook his head, but Johnny Gidlow remarked in a low voice: “They say his mother is dead, Mr. Graycote. I’m afraid it’s true because the report came from Barton’s at the shop, and I know they sometimes get a letter from Mr. Davison.”

“Poor chap!” ejaculated South, thinking of John Davison. “He was out of prison long ago. I wonder what he’s doing?”

“I believe his father said he wouldn’t have him at home,” Gidlow went on sorrowfully. “He said John might earn his living as best he could.”

It was the first time for several months that they had mentioned Davison’s name, and they now discussed his prospects at some length.

“We’ve come to a *cul-de-sac!*” exclaimed Graycote suddenly, and peering through his spectacles at a great growth of bramble and gorse that confronted them. “There’s nothing for it but to turn back.”

“There ought to be a way round,” said Jack; “but we musn’t risk losing ourselves, or we shall keep them waiting for luncheon. Better go back the road we came by.”

Graycote tried hard to steer the conversation into another channel, but somehow Jack could only talk of Davison.

“Poor fellow!” he said again and again, “how I wish we could do something for him!”

“*Do you really mean that?*”

The three boys almost leaped into the air. There had been a sudden rustle among the bramble bushes, and the figure of John Davison stood before them.

“Do you really mean what you say, Mr. South?” Davison repeated.

“Of course I do,” said Jack, who was greatly startled. “But I’d no idea you were in the neighborhood.”

“I shouldn’t have been, if I’d known you were coming here,” Davison continued. “I didn’t mean you to see me. I saw you coming along and hid myself in that bush. Then as you passed I heard you talking about me, and when you came back you were still talking of me, and well —”

Here Davison broke into such bitter weeping as the three lads had never witnessed before. He was a pitiable object. He seemed to have grown thin and lanky, and his dusty clothes hung about him loosely. His cap had fallen off, and the close-cropped head and pale, worn features were sad to look upon.

“What can we do for you?” Jack asked gently as the other’s weeping began to subside. “We’re awfully sorry for you, Davison — you know that.”

But it was some time before the lad could trust himself to speak.

“It’s the way you talked about me amongst yourselves that fetched me,” he said at length. “I thought you’d hate me and shun me all the days of my life. I’d no idea lads could forgive. I always thought it rather the thing to go on hating — manly, you know, and all that. When I first saw you coming along, I felt as if I could murder the three of you, and then jump into the river out yonder; but when I listened to what you said and found you were all sorry for me, well — I felt different somehow. You see, there’s nobody now to care a rap for me. I haven’t a friend left on earth. I suppose you’ve heard of my mother’s —”

Davison broke off, and turning his back upon the trio, leant his head against a tree and sobbed afresh. Jack went up to him and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

“You need something to eat, Davison, I’m sure,” said South. “You’re faint and weak for want of food. Come along with us a little way, and we’ll bring you something and see what can be done for you.”

Jack took him by the hand and led him along. Graycote and Gidlow, much moved, followed in silence.

“Perhaps you won’t care to join us, but we’ve plenty of grub, and if you like we’ll bring a square meal to some quiet spot where you won’t be seen. Then I’ll speak to my father about you — privately.”

Davison pressed Jack's hand, and then the two other members of the quartette came up and silently shook hands with the suffering lad.

. . . . .

Two hours later John Davison had left Tishley Wood, and was making his way to the nearest railway station. He had dined well for the first time for many long months, and he had two pounds in his pocket. Dr. South himself had interviewed the unfortunate boy.

"Of course, sir, I'm ready to work," Davison had said. "When I was sent to gaol for six months' hard labor, I knew very well that meant hard labor for life. I could work on a farm if anybody would employ me. I'm not very strong just now, but with good food I should soon pick up again."

Dr. South spoke kindly to the lad, and tried to encourage him.

"I will write a little note to Mr. Wilson of Clemington," the Doctor said, tearing a leaf or two from his pocket book. "He will receive you for a time, at any rate, and I shall visit him in a few days."

So Davison travelled to Clemington with a comparatively light heart. He had been discharged from gaol five days before, but hard as the prison life was, he had found that of a tramp much harder. Homelessness and absolute loneliness were more than he could bear. He had been tempted to suicide more than once, and every river he came across had had

a fascination for him. To have a roof of any kind over his head would be a perfect joy.

The three boys accompanied him part of the way to the station, and when they bade him farewell, Davison took an almost affectionate leave of Johnny Gidlow.

“ You will never be able to forgive me *really*, Johnny,” he said, putting his hand very tenderly over the big scar on Gidlow’s forehead. “ I deserved more than six months for being such a brute to you.”

“ But I *do* forgive you, *really*,” Johnny cried out, taking the big lad’s hand between his own palms. “ And I’d have saved you from being sent to prison, if I could; but I couldn’t, you know. I forgive you — from my heart.”

Davison pressed the scarred forehead to his breast for an instant and was gone.

“ I can’t help thinking he’ll turn out well, after all,” said Jack.

Both Graysote and Gidlow assented.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### TEN YEARS LATER

“Please you, I’ll tell you as we pass along,  
That you will wonder what hath fortuned.  
Come . . . ‘tis your penance but to hear  
The story of your loves discovered.  
That done, our day of marriage shall be yours;  
One feast . . . one mutual happiness.”

—*Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

Four young men are sitting at luncheon in the dining-room of the farm at Clemington. One of them is Jack South, now twenty-six years old, the owner and occupier of the big farm upon which as a boy of fifteen he had been sent to work for four months. Sitting opposite to him is John Davison, his trusty farm-bailiff and faithful friend. On Jack’s right is the Hon. John Graycote, who spends more of his time at Clemington than in his ancestral halls. Opposite to him is Johnny Gidlow, still very boyish-looking, though he is nearing his twenty-fifth birthday. He is now a distinguished professor of music and singing in the country town, not many miles away, and is a frequent and welcome visitor at the farm.

“And so,” Graycote is saying a little sadly, “this is the very last time the four Jacks will meet—at any rate—”

"John, you were always a croaker. The last time, indeed! I should just think not. The last time, perhaps, we shall meet at a bachelor luncheon party; but don't forget the smoking-room. My intended wife is not numbered among the ladies who smoke. And it was only yesterday she said to me when I told her the 'Cards' were going to meet: 'Do tell them that your old boy friends will always find a home at Clemington.' Now, what say you to that, John?"

Clubs, Hearts and Spades exchange smiles.

"The builders are getting on apace," Gidlow remarks. "It is only a fortnight since I was here, and the new wing wasn't roofed over. Now they are glazing the windows."

"Oh," exclaims Jack, laughing merrily. "I have helped them no end by being on the spot. I should have been content with the old house as it was, but my father insisted upon making these additions. He said I should be sure to want a lot of bedrooms; I hope that means that he and mother will come here often. And then the old drawing-room is rather small; and there was no room that I could use as a study or for smoking purposes."

"You must come and see my new cottage before you go," Davison says with a happy look. "I call it a villa, but Mr. South seems to think I shall want more space by-and-by."

"Davison is a humbug," cries the laughing Jack. "He knows very well that he's only waiting for me

to get married and settled before he does the same himself."

Davison's blushes are a sufficient confession, and he receives the hearty congratulations of Graycote and Gidlow.

"And when is this new volume of lyrics coming out?" Gidlow inquires.

"Well," says Jack, pretending to consider, "probably on the day Professor Gidlow's new cantata is published."

Gidlow protests merrily that his score is not nearly ready for publication, but that he knows South's poems are in the hands of the printers.

"I don't mind telling you fellows that I'm keeping the book back a bit. I want to dedicate it to my wife, you see. The first collection was inscribed 'To my mother and father'; on my wedding-day I want to give the first copy to Maggie, and with the dedication printed inside."

"This is just the place for a poet," says Graycote, "particularly for a pastoral poet like you, Jack."

"If you call me names, John, you shan't have any more claret," Jack exclaims, filling his friend's glass. "But, really, I am in love with the old farm. I began to like it even when, as a lad, I slept in the hay-loft and got up at four in the morning and fetched up the cows and milked 'em and cleaned out the sheds and stables. Do you remember, John, how

horrified you were when you first came across me in the yard?"

"I wasn't horrified," Graycote protests. "You looked awfully clean and neat though you had nothing on but shirt and corduroy trousers. I confess I was startled."

Jack laughs heartily and then says:

"Poor old Wilson! *He* startled me when I first met him. But what a good fellow he was! He made a man of me!"

"And of me, also," Davison chimes in earnestly. "He was awfully good to me from — from the beginning. But for him and your father, Mr. South, and yourself — where should I be?"

"You were with Mr. Wilson when he died — weren't you?" Jack asks quickly in order to avoid unpleasant reminiscences.

"I was, Mr. South, and his death made me a Catholic, as you know."

Jack changes the subject. Only one of the four remains outside the Church, and Jack hopes that Graycote's reception is only a matter of time.

Heavy rain is falling outside, and when luncheon is over, the four young men settle down to a rubber of whist — "for love," Jack announces. They lose and win, win and lose; but as Jack remarks at the end of the rubber, it is astonishing how frequently *spades* are trumps. Clubs looks at Diamonds, and Hearts — the

scar is still visible on his forehead and will be as long as he lives — Hearts looks at Clubs. No one speaks, but Spades blushes a little and, Diamonds setting the example, they join hands.

THE END







FEB 13 1909



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00024837907

